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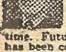

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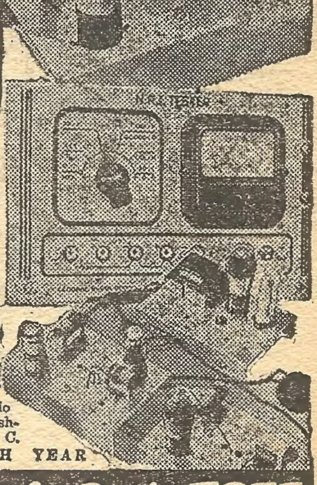

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COSMIC ENCORES

A DEPARTMENT WHERE SCIENCE FICTION READERS AND THE EDITOR MEET

THERE is no need to be afraid of science fiction. It is our hope that we can get this fact across to any neophytes who may be dipping a gooseflesh-stippled toe into the swirling pool of stf. It is also our hope that veteran readers will voluntarily perform missionary work to this effect among those folk they know who have that minescular germ of free imagination which is the only requirement of stf enjoyment—or for that matter enjoyment of almost anything else.

We have increasingly of recent years run across people who seem to think that ability to understand a science fiction story demands a cross between the universal comprehension of an Einstein and the inexplicable intuitions of an instant calculator. With science all about them—in the form of new gadgets, in the newspapers, overheard at lunch table conversations, on the radio and TV—they want desperately to get into the act.

At the local lending libraries they see burgeoning shelves of stf anthologies and other published works crowding into the shelves hitherto devoted exclusively to mystery stories and historical romances. They want to know what it is all about—but they are afraid, if they take one of these volumes home with them, not so much of boredom as of seeming stupid to their acquaintances.

A Busman's Holiday

Science fiction, they have been told, rightly or otherwise, is where the Oppenheimers and Bushes, the Comptons and the Smyths, find their entertainment on rainy afternoons. It provides a busman's holiday for the nuclear physicist, the bio-chemist, the psychiatrist and the most advanced "pure" mathematician.

To some degree the above is probably true, at any rate in less exalted circles of our scientific hierarchy. But cowboys read Western stories by the ream and bushel in the comfort of their air-conditioned bunkhouses—and no one expects the average urban or semi-urban Western reader to know how to bulldog a calf or brand a steer.

Police lieutenants and detectives love to read mystery stories—yet it is not demanded of the lay reader that he be able to run off a ballistics test convincingly or know the techniques of suspect interrogation with or without a rubber hose. Major leaguers—those who have risen above the comics—dote on sports fiction but it is not expect that every reader be an accomplished exponent of the drag bunt.

In other words, you do not have to be a scientist to enjoy stf. We should know—we love it and the entire sixteen years of our formal education were spent in a desperate and generally successful effort to avoid taking any science courses whatever.

The Jabberwocky Curtain

Ironically or otherwise most of this fear stasis where stf is concerned is the fault of science fiction itself—and the guilt must be apportioned just about equally between its veteran readers and its editors. Basically the development of the Jabberwocky Curtain that frightens off much of its currently vast potential market is the result of two entirely human (and therefore perilous) impulses.

The primal impulse is the desire to make what is still in some quarters considered an under-the-counter hobby of vital importance. Parents and teachers and just plain friends have for decades shown a regrettable tendency toward eyebrow lifting or open derision when confronted with the stf reader, furtive or otherwise.

"Why do you want to waste time mucking around with trash like that?" they inquire. "What do you hope to get out of it?"

To which the addict—who usually doesn't know just why he does go for the stuff—can only draw himself up and insist that in stf lies the key to the gates of the future, that his derider is an ostrich whose limited mentality is incapable of understanding the realities that underlie reality. In the case of parents and teachers this response is usually confined to thinking rather than utterance.

About Face!

Fortunately, since August 6, 1945, the near-universal derision has undergone a considerable about-face. People are no longer derisive of theoretical science, even in fiction form, since the shadow of the A-bomb first overhung the petty realisms of daily existence.

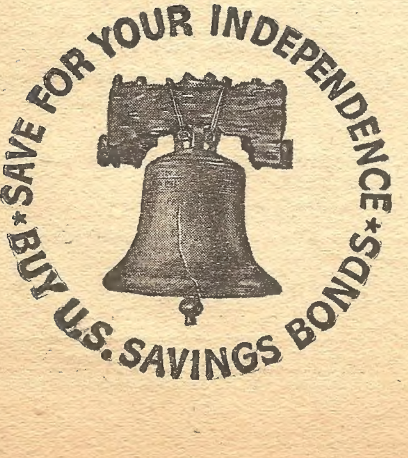
Unfortunately, although frightened, most people understand application of theoretical reasoning as little as they ever did. Today, they tend to invest it with a succession of veils of mystery that might well have baffled Salome, to say nothing of Gypsy Rose Lee.

They don't sneer at stf—they're scared of it. And either way they avoid it, which is patently absurd. It is up to all of us to do all in our power to strip from stf these opaque guardian layers.

Exclusive Clubs

The secondary impulse, which is more serious if equally human, lies in the desire of any minority to transform itself into an

(Continued on page 155)



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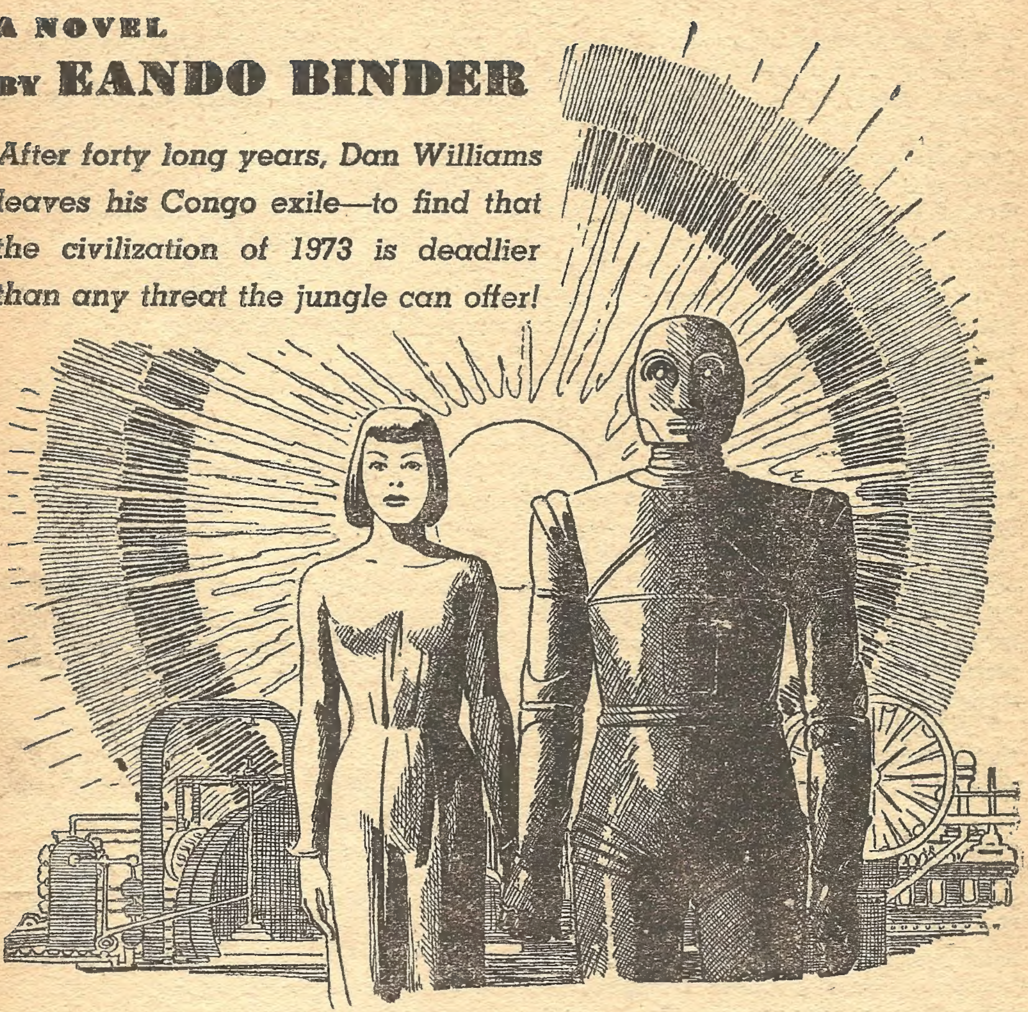
A NOVEL

BY **EANDO BINDER**

After forty long years, Dan Williams leaves his Congo exile—to find that the civilization of 1973 is deadlier than any threat the jungle can offer!



ENSLAVED BRAINS

CHAPTER I

Return from the Primeval

FROM the top of a tumbled rock ridge, Earl Hackworth pointed down into a long, barren valley.

"There's my ship," he said. "Isn't it a wonderful sight in primeval country? Like a jewel in a setting of lead."

His blue-eyed companion studied the object which indeed glinted like a fiery gem in the strong sunlight, but he made no answer.

Far back was the green spreading jungle—the cruel, hot jungle which

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it had taken them three agonizing weeks to traverse. It seemed to crouch like a savage beast, relentless, waiting. It hurled defiance to man, but man had won. From its edge to where the two men stood was sickly scrubland, accursed by nature, avoided by even the lowly snake. It had been as hot as the inside of a furnace and deceptively long. It had seemed to mock their dragging limbs and vanishing water supply. Even the jungle was better.

But that was all over now. Jungle and waste had been conquered. Danger and suffering had buffeted them and left them weaker in body but stronger in spirit. Before them was but a short trip to the valley of naked sand. Then a man-made thing, an incredible marvel in aboriginal Africa, would take them up and away from feverish lowland jungle, from heartless scrub wastes, leaving them only a bitter memory.

"Well, Williams," Hackworth said to the blue-eyed man, "how do you like my ship?"

"Your ship!" Williams repeated, his eyes unfocused from his inward concentration.

"Yes, the ship I told you about," Hackworth said. "The ship that will take *you* from a ghastly exile. It's a 'sansrun,' or helicopter airplane, and can rise vertically—vastly different from the planes you'll soon remember from years ago, Williams, that had to have a runway for taking off. Do you understand, old boy, or am I still talking too fast for you?"

"I can—understand," Williams said, his words slow and precise.

"Good," Hackworth said. "In another few weeks you won't have any trouble at all. Forty years is a long time. . . . Now let's get the boys and finish our trek. You call 'em, Williams. You speak their garbled Bantu better than I ever hope to. Just two more hours, and then—farewell to Africa, jungle, and sand."

But Williams made no immediate move to call the "boys," or native *safari* men. Some strong emotion had gripped him. On his tanned face, darkened to a coffee color, was an odd expression of dismay, almost of fear.

"What's the matter?" Hackworth asked sharply.

Williams evasively muttered something in native dialect as his blue eyes glazed with his strong feelings.

"Listen here!" cried Hackworth. "Out with it. Something's bothering you."

WILLIAMS turned an agonized face to him.

"I can't do it!" His voice was high and jerky. His throat muscles worked spasmodically. "Africa, Olgor . . . . it belongs to me. . . . I belong to it! *Musri et kraal!* How can I leave my home?"

Hackworth was thunderstruck. He stared at the brawny Williams and saw handsome features tightened with inner pain. Could this man have once been the eager, joyous cousin of his boyhood? Or was this all a spell of magic Africa?

Hackworth stretched forth both hands, grasping the man by the shoulders.

"You *don't* belong here!" he said firmly. "You are a white man, Williams, as I am. You are my cousin. You were born far from this continent of mystery and misery. You are an exile here. The civilization of the white man, your natural heritage, calls you!"

"I'm afraid!" cried Williams suddenly. "Forty years. . . . I'm afraid to go back!"

Hackworth shook him, none too gently.

"Afraid?" he roared. "Of what?"

Williams gulped. "Civilization . . . I wouldn't fit. . . . I'm only a white man by birth. At heart, after forty years, I'm like our *safari* boys—like M'bopo."

"Dan!" The name was wrung out of Hackworth by his cousin's emotional outburst. Yet that name had power. It suddenly rolled the mists of dusty time away from Williams' memories.

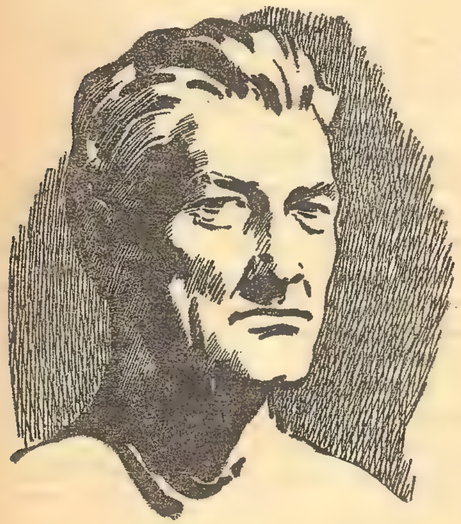
"Dan!" Hackworth repeated eagerly, seeing that he had fanned a spark.

"Dan, you remember? Kids in Baltimore—how we played together, fought together? We were pals. . . . Dan, how can you say you belong in Africa?"

The blue eyes glistened, looking back upon a life that had been buried under a landslide of later impressions. Williams smiled weakly.

"Of course you're right. I'll go start the boys off."

As Williams left with a firm step, Hackworth was thinking that not until that moment had either of them realized what they were to each other. "Hackworth" and "Williams" they had called each other as strangers. Forty years of Africa had set up a barrier. Only that magic name "Dan" had pierced the wall of time.



DAN WILLIAMS

Williams got the *safari* men started with their heavy packs, down the winding trail of crumbling sandstone. The two white men brought up the rear with rifles. A new eagerness was in all of them, tired though they were from the three-week trek from wildest Congo. The spearing glint of the airship in the valley promised rest and ease. They would reach it before sundown. Back of them the upflung ridge of wind-worn rock blotted out the jungle.

Forty years before, Dan Williams, only eighteen, but already full-grown and dependable, had left the United States with his father, on an exploration into the Congo. His father had had two purposes in mind—to penetrate the jungles just above the northern bend of the Congo River, and to find some trace of a previous expedition which had gone in there and never returned.

They came upon Pierre D'Lawoef, sole survivor of the other expedition, with friendly Bantu natives, but he was dying from knife wounds.

A wandering tribe of savage Zulus had destroyed his five white companions and their black boys. He had managed to escape and had lived with unwarlike tribes for eight years. But just before the Williams' expedition had come, the blood-thirsty Zulus had reappeared and given the Frenchman his death wounds.

The elder Williams began to fear for the safety of his own party and gave the order to trek back to the river. But too late, for screaming Zulus with hideous painted faces had puffed out of the jungle and attacked with kris and spear. Rifle fire drove them off only after three of the white men and a dozen *safari* boys had been killed, outright, and the others wounded.

Dan Williams had seen all this, and not long after had seen his father, the last of the white men, die of infection. Kindly Bantu natives adopted the orphan white boy, and forty years of Africa had made him a native in all but birth. He became as much a child of nature as the Bantus, and so exceeded them in physical and mental exploits, that for thirty years he had been unquestioned patriarch of the tribe.

MORE than once he had thought of reaching the Congo River and civilization but the Zulus roamed the lands between and the ever-present threat of Zulu attack aroused his fighting instinct. He trained the Bantus in simple warfare, and the Zulus came to respect his tribe which, though they had only bone and flint weapons, fought like demons.

So had Dan Williams spent a lifetime in Africa.

Then had come an echo from the dim past. A lone white man and his native *safari* had come, had embraced him and called him "cousin." And gradually Dan Williams had recognized his strange words.

Earl Hackworth had made three efforts in those forty years to find out what had happened to his uncle and cousin. His third had succeeded only after discovering a route free of the Zulu menace.

Hackworth had found his cousin to be a tall and amazingly strong man whose elastic step and youthful poise belied his fifty-eight years. Despite a dark-brown skin, scraggly bleached hair, and unkempt beard, Dan Williams was virile and sternly handsome.

Overjoyed, Hackworth had planned an immediate return. Williams, hesitant at first, finally agreed. But all during the three weeks' crossing of the jungles and wastes, he had been moody and taciturn. The truth was that Williams had been in a bewildered dream until that cry of "Dan" had recalled forgotten things.

And with that word had Dan Williams' forty years in the Dark Continent become just an interlude.

When they were within a mile of the ship, two black dots near the airship waved.

"My armed guards," exclaimed Hackworth.

Though he had landed in the valley, hidden from view of the wasteland, he had taken no chance that wandering natives might damage or plunder the ship.

They reached it as evening shadows began to crawl across the valley floor. Before the sudden tropical darkness had overtaken them, they had stored most of their supplies in the roomy hold.

"We'll start at daybreak," Hackworth shouted to the natives. "Have anything you please for supper tonight."

With shouts of joy in anticipation of a delectable meal, the black boys built a fire.

Dan Williams looked over the airplane with an interested eye. Compared to the craft he had known of forty years before, this one seemed a monstrous distortion. To him it seemed practically all wings. Two mighty engines were set at about the mid-point of each wing. From close up, it looked ungainly and ugly, yet from the ridge top it had looked graceful and light, like a poised dragon-fly ready to spring enthusiastically into the air.

"What makes it rise vertically?" he asked, in a slow, measured voice, for as yet English was laborious for him, his tongue having rolled off guttural Bantu dialect for forty long years.

Hackworth chuckled. "Well, Dan, this is a nineteen-seventy-three model. The wing design and draft deflectors are engineering developments never thought of forty years ago. They make it possible for a heavy all-metal ship like that to rise vertically. Without cutting engine speed, the pilot swings the engines horizontal when the ship has gained sufficient altitude."

"Do you own—the thing?" asked Williams.

"Sure."

"It looks expensive. You must have made a fortune. My father could never have gone on his exploration without the Belgian Government standing all expenses."

"I'll explain all that some other time," returned Hackworth with a short laugh. "By the way—that rawhide bundle of yours. If it has anything fragile in it, you'd better take it into the cabin. Otherwise I'll put it in the hold."

"In the cabin," said Williams quickly.

"And tomorrow," Hackworth went on, "you're going to get into civilized clothes. Those loin skins may look right to your Bantu friends, but not on the coast."

Williams looked down at his practically naked body, then raised amused eyes.

"And I'm going to—to shave also."

They ate a delicious stew of meats and vegetables in the soft moonlit night, then crawled into Hackworth's tent.

CHAPTER II

Back to Civilization

WILLIAMS found it hard to sleep. Tomorrow he would see civilization.

Forty years! How different would things be? What strange things had come to pass?

Africa. It was all around him, in the silvered shafts of moonlight. His mind visioned desert, wasteland, jungle, fertile river areas, the village of his simple Bantu friends. He murmured farewell.

"*Akka musri et graal umo*—farewell to my home that was."

In the dawn, the camp was quickly broken up and all stored away in the ship's hold.

The tall mulatto pilot Hackworth had hired at Kabinda, went busily about the ship, inspecting everything thoroughly.

Hackworth called the three Bantus from Williams' tribe who had accompanied the party.

He handed them mirrors, combs, and colored beads, and as a gesture of great gratitude, presented a pair of binoculars to M'bopo.

M'bopo, deeply attached to Williams, stared dumbly at the glasses.

"Good-by, M'bopo," said Williams in dialect. "May the spirits honor and cherish your prosperity in years to come."

Hackworth could detect the deep feeling between those two.

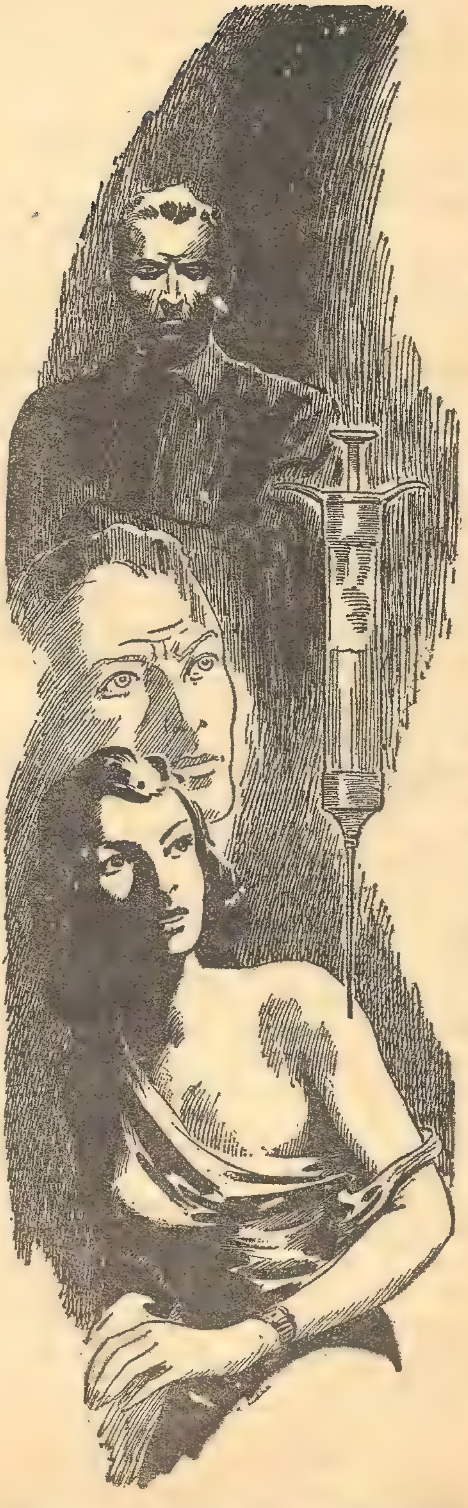
The wiry little soot-black man whose sleek body fairly writhed with muscles, suddenly dashed the binoculars violently to the ground and the next moment was kneeling before Williams, crying over and over:

"*Umo ishta umi*—take me with you!"

Williams looked at Hackworth, his eyes moist, then exchanged several rapid phrases with the black.

"He says that he wants to go with me even to the Seven Hills—Bantu for the end of space," Williams said. "Hackworth—"

Hackworth hesitated, thinking of an



Without a word Lila bared her arm [Chapter IV] ignorant Negro in the supercivilization of America. Then he nodded.

"Plenty of room for him, Dan."

M'bopo leaped high into the air, turned his body around once, and slapped the soles of his feet together, all before landing again.

"He was the moon-dancer," explained Williams, seeing the astonishment in Hackworth's face. "Some of his acrobatic tricks would make you believe he was a wizard. Clever fellow. Attached to me. I'm not sorry he wants to come along."

Hackworth shouted for the men to board ship. Like a swarm of black hornets, screaming in childish joy, the natives scrambled into the ovoid. Plainly they considered the ride to the coast in an airplane the greatest of all great things. When they were all in, arranged on the benches by the aloof, English-speaking mulatto pilot, the two white men and M'bopo entered. Hackworth pointed to a bench facing the front window.

The cabin was roomy and bright. The soft woolen cushions on the benches were form-fitting and comfortable.

At a signal from Hackworth, the pilot moved his hands on the controls. The ship trembled and rose so gently that Williams saw the ground far below a moment later. Up and up it went as though pulled by some cosmic winch and chain. Then the tone beats of the engines changed as the pilot swung them to a horizontal pitch. With a pleasant surge, the airplane leaped forward. Below, the African topography blended into a flowing panorama.

Williams, peering around in fascination, muttered to himself in Bantu dialect. His white man's soul tried to be nonchalant; his native superinduced temperament trembled. It might be days, weeks, or more, before he could be free of Africa and its subtle influence. . . .

Hackworth paid off his *safari* men at Kabinda on the coast—a modern and important African port—and arranged to have his plane shipped to South America. He was a professional explorer, which had run in his and Dan's line for generations.

Obtaining passports for Williams and M'bopo at Kabinda, and attending to other matters took so much time that there was little chance for conversation, beyond talk of family affairs. Williams heard that the last remaining member of his family, his sister Helen, had died five years before.

Hackworth, and the explorer's daughter, were now Williams' closest relatives.

Hackworth bought tickets on the "hyp-marine" for quick passage to America. To Williams, at first glance, it had looked like a snub-nosed submarine, but with the difference that it had wings, short and stubby, at rear and front; along its upper length were spaced ten giant engine-housings; and there were thousands of tiny round spots running in lengthwise rows, gleaming with the iridescence of heavy glass.

When he first glimpsed it, it rested high and dry on a runway of rails at the end of the huge dock. In size it was much smaller than ocean liners he recalled.

WITH deepest interest Williams was surveying this craft that was to take them back to America when Hackworth stopped beside him smiling.

"Well, Dan, old boy," he said, "what do you think of the hyp-marine?"

"Wonderful," said Williams, looking down at the tumbled ocean surface. "But it doesn't have any decks. I don't like the idea of being cooped up in one little room for several days. Give me ocean liners with a promenade deck where one can breath fresh salt air."

Hackworth smiled again. "Several days? Dan, we'll be in New York in twenty hours! You forget this is Nineteen-seventy-three. Our speed, constant and unvarying, is three hundred miles an hour."

"Impossible!" spluttered Williams. "Six thousand miles in twenty hours?"

"What would you say if I told you it is possible to cross from Europe to

America in *two* hours, by means of stratosphere rocket ships?" Hackworth laughed at the startled expression in Williams' face. "Why, Dan, the three hundred miles an hour this hyp-marine makes is nothing these days for speed. There were many test flights, even back twenty years ago, when that speed was doubled—or more."

Williams relapsed into amazed silence.

The departure from port was a great thrill for Williams and his Bantu friend. First, the deep hum of air engines, gradually climbing the harmonic scale. Then the ship slid along the runway. There was a sinking sensation and the sound of lapping water, followed by a deep-throated roar from above.

For minutes, the ship swayed and rocked. Then gradually smoothness came, and Williams saw the ocean surface recede until not even the highest waves touched them. In a half-hour, the motion of the craft became uniform, and the noise above became a muffled drone. At the constant height of a hundred feet above water level, the hyp-marine skimmed the ocean like a preying gull.

The ship's interior ran in lengthwise tiers, five rows of rooms with corridors in between. The price for a room against the hull, and therefore having a round window for viewing seascapes, was double that of any interior room. But in comfort and elegance the rooms were uniform.

Hackworth and his two companions had a room for three, with three beds, three leather seats, sundry decorative articles, and a mirror. In this mirror, Williams had surveyed himself in surprise. Clean-shaven and scrupulously clean, he did not look at all like the wild image he had seen reflected in still African pools. His fine straw-yellow hair set off his healthy tan and sturdy features handsomely. Not one in a million would guess his age. He was a man in his prime, and felt that way.

Clothing styles had not changed much with men, except that tight collars had disappeared. The suit that Hackworth had helped him purchase at Kabinda was open-necked, a dull red. M'bopo had been outfitted with a soft green. Hackworth was wearing a suit of sky blue. Williams had noticed that all the white men at Kabinda had worn colorful clothing.

M'bopo quickly proved adaptable. His eyes were constantly rolling in wonder but his features were inscrutable. He was as silent as an English butler, and not in the least troublesome. For him it was enough that "Orno Akku" (The White Orphan) was near him.

They had several meals in the huge public dining cabin, and for the rest of the time were glad to sleep. The trek through steamy, miasmic jungle had sapped their strength.

About an hour after they had left port Williams turned from the window to face Hackworth, who was undressing for bed. That morning, in Kabinda, Hackworth had received a radiogram. Reading it, he had contracted his brows fiercely, then without a word hastily stuffed the message away. Williams had wondered, for he had seen Hackworth's worry which now had grown deeper.

"Something is bothering you, Earl," Williams said. "That radiogram?"

Hackworth's face became suddenly haggard.

"Oh, just something personal, Dan," he said.

Their eyes met.

"Wouldn't it be better if you unburdened yourself?" Williams asked quietly.

HACKWORTH hesitated, then motioned to chairs. They sat down.

"Dan, I've told you I have a daughter," said Hackworth, "a lovely girl of twenty. The radiogram was from her. What we've most dreaded has finally happened. She has been summoned by the Unidum to marry a man she has never met and she—she loves another man."

"Unidum?" queried Williams perplexed. "Marry a man she has never met?"

Hackworth looked out at the limitless sweep of ocean and sky.

"I see I'll have to do a little explaining, Dan. Our government today, the Unidum, is a sort of combination democracy and dictatorship, with a capitol in New York City—"

"Sarto je Bru!" Williams burst out, with a Bantu curse. "What has become of our Constitution, of Congress and—"

"Later, Dan," said Hackworth, waving a hand. "Right now just remember there is a new regime under the Unidum. This ruling body made a national law ten years ago requiring all women to undergo eugenics tests before marriage. If the tests show the woman to fall into a certain genetical class, she is conscripted to become the mate of a scientist, for their children will have unusual intelligence, will become scientists themselves!"

Astonishment and anger darkened the listening man's face.

"Lila—my daughter—met a young man named Terry Spath—a splendid chemist," Hackworth went on, "and they fell in love. I approved of him and hoped to see them married. They would have been happy." Hackworth sighed heavily. "Lila took the unavoidable pre-marriage test a month ago. She wanted to have it over with and marry young Spath. There are really few women who prove fit and are conscripted, now this had to happen!"

He buried his face in his hands.

Williams was horrified. It was ghastly. It was medieval, cruel, senseless!

"When must Lila leave home?"

"She'll be gone when we get there," said Hackworth. "The Unidum is strict—and inexorable."

"Heartless, I'd say!" declared Williams. "Is there any way we can get to her before she is out of our reach entirely?"

"Well, yes."

HACKWORTH pulled out the radiogram and glanced at it.

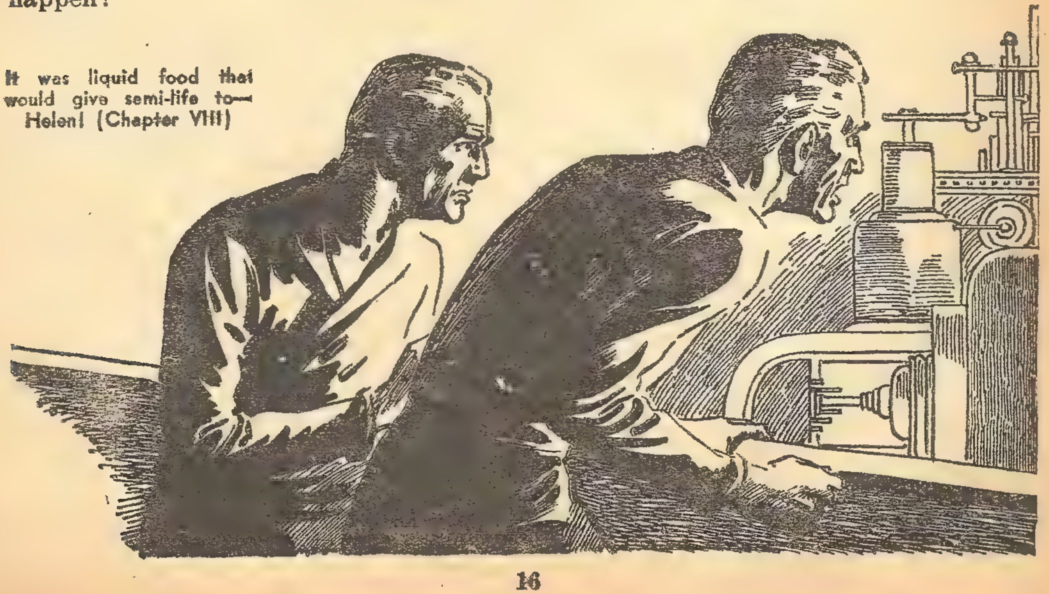
"She will be at a down-town air terminal for a half-hour after we arrive in New York. But what's the idea, Dan?" he asked, bewildered.

"If we can catch Lila in time, she will *not* become an unwilling bride!"

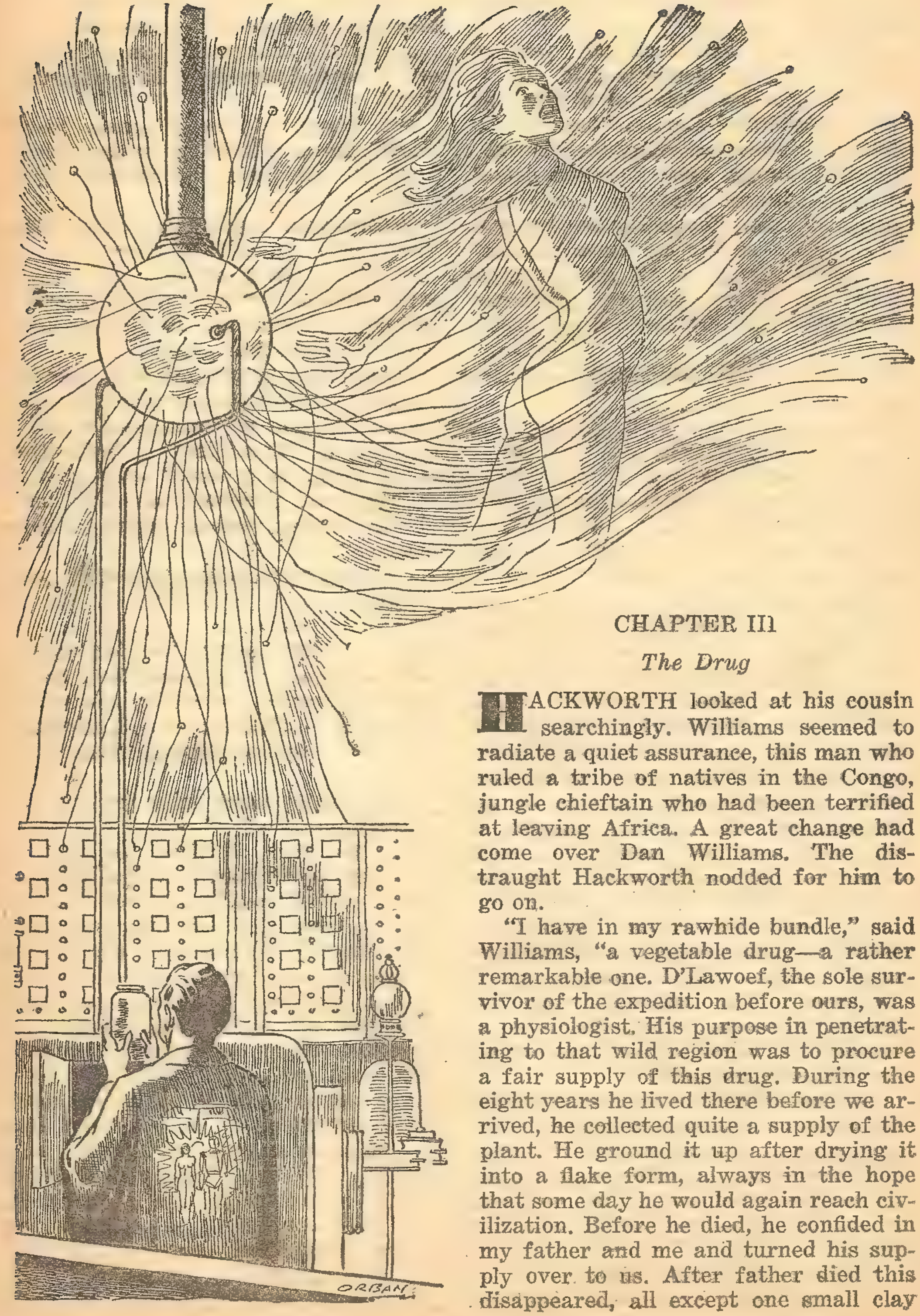
Hackworth looked at his cousin with narrowed eyes. Had the long exile warped his mind? Did he think some crude jungle tactics could save Lila? The man had no realization of the Unidum.

"Impossible!" Hackworth said with finality.

"Earl," Williams said firmly, "your daughter's future and happiness are at stake. Are you willing to gamble for her sake?"



It was liquid food that would give semi-life to—Helen! (Chapter VIII)



CHAPTER III

The Drug

HACKWORTH looked at his cousin searchingly. Williams seemed to radiate a quiet assurance, this man who ruled a tribe of natives in the Congo, jungle chieftain who had been terrified at leaving Africa. A great change had come over Dan Williams. The distraught Hackworth nodded for him to go on.

"I have in my rawhide bundle," said Williams, "a vegetable drug—a rather remarkable one. D'Lawoef, the sole survivor of the expedition before ours, was a physiologist. His purpose in penetrating to that wild region was to procure a fair supply of this drug. During the eight years he lived there before we arrived, he collected quite a supply of the plant. He ground it up after drying it into a flake form, always in the hope that some day he would again reach civilization. Before he died, he confided in my father and me and turned his supply over to us. After father died this disappeared, all except one small clay box of it, which I have in my rawhide bundle."

Hackworth waited silently, wondering what all this would lead to.

"The alcoholic extraction of this vegetable," Williams went on, "has remarkable properties, according to D'Lawoef. Injected into the veins, it puts a person into a comatose condition for a long period of time, depending on the dose. The subject suffers no harm provided nourishment is given, like that given patients with sleeping sickness, either sugar in the veins, or simple liquid food."

HACKWORTH suddenly saw the significance.

"Then you suggest," he gasped, "that Lila be given the drug and—"

"And her marriage to the scientist forestalled. After that, we can plan what to do."

The hope in Hackworth's face was suddenly replaced by despair.

"But the Unidum! They will send investigators. Suspicion will be directed at us—"

"Are you even afraid to gamble?" Williams was suddenly scornful. "This Unidum—you talk as if it were a king and you its abject slave! Forty years ago people did not cringe to government, especially when it was in the wrong. And this eugenics business is certainly tyrannically applied. . . . Well, Earl, shall we use the drug, or let Lila be married with a broken heart?"

"It's worth the chance!" cried Hackworth, springing to his feet. Abruptly he added weakly: "But the drug might be dangerous! What assurance have we, beyond D'Lawoef's word, that it is not harmful? It might poison Lila, cripple her, derange her mind!"

Williams leaped to his feet and paced the room. He was willing to trust D'Lawoef's word, having known the man. But Hackworth would naturally be apprehensive about letting his daughter be drugged by a substance unknown and untried.

Suddenly Williams whirled.

"Young Terry is a chemist, isn't he? We'll put the whole matter before him, let him test the drug some way, and make the final decision. After all, he is more vitally concerned than either you or I. Love and knowledge both will guide him."

"If Terry approves," cried Hackworth, his face lighting up again with hope, "I can have no further objections."

With a great load off his mind, Hackworth began again to undress.

"Can we get a message to Terry?" said Williams. "Time is precious. There will be little enough of it after we dock. We must have him prepared."

Hackworth looked dubious. "Radiograms are carefully looked over by Unidum officials. If we even mentioned Lila's name immediate investigation might start. They would apprehend us on the dock. However, we *could* send him an urgent message asking him to meet us."

"Get that message through," said Williams. . . .

TWO hours before the hyp-marine was due at the New York docks, when they were thoroughly rested and wide-awake, Williams asked Hackworth to explain the mysterious Unidum more fully.

Hackworth went into explanation directly.

"In the early Fifties," he said, "a great war which for some time had been brewing, broke out in Europe, after the one aggressor state left there had made stupendous preparations for it in the matter of huge tanks, guns, ordinary bombs, rockets and other armaments, with that boastful state confident of eventual world domination. Already that state had conquered other smaller states within its near orbit, had made them satellites and armed them. The great Asiatic country of China had been overrun by the dictator's arrogant hordes, and bloody war had been brought to other Eastern countries, like Korea, which had involved our own country as well as other states in Europe.

"It was called the All-Nations War,

and cataclysmic battles quickly brought in every nation in the world in greater or lesser degree. It was World War One and World War Two all over again—neither of which concerned you in deepest Africa—but ten times more hideous. Because even the aggressor nation which had started the holocaust had not fully realized the devastation of the atom bomb, although that had been horribly illustrated in Hiroshima when Japan was defeated at the supposed close of World War Two. Japan had brought the United States into the conflict by a sneak bombing attack on Pearl Harbor. World War Two was started by a mountebank named Hitler who stirred up the German people to war."

Williams was looking perplexed.

"This A-bomb, Dan—" he said, "which I will try to explain to you later, was not known until World War Two. But in the All-Nations War, a still more deadly missile—the H-bomb, or hydrogen bomb—made its appearance, all but writing finis to humanity. In an unbelievably short time all governments were tottering. Europe was a shambles, and a Titanic revolution broke out in what had been the United States. Hostilities finally ceased for pure lack of armament, as well as the impossibility of obtaining any more of the rare materials to make more A-bombs and H-bombs, and civilization found itself horribly shattered.

"To me, a young petty officer at the time, it was a fearsome nightmare. It was—hideous!

"Then came the rise of the Unidum. A group of scientists and men of philosophy, having foreseen the result, because of knowing better than all others the scourge their bombs could be, had banded together in preparation. It pushed over the staggering governments, set up its own, and brought reason out of chaos. The Unidum officially came into being as the central government of all Europe and North America. Asia promptly formed a federation under a ruling central power. Africa and South America also formed unit federations.

"The Unidum capital is in New York City, once the headquarters of the United Nations, a body formed after World War Two, supposedly for arbitration and the prevention of wars. After its downfall the Unidum took over, and from that city now guides the collective destiny of a half-billion souls."

Williams whistled in amazement. "How is it possible to hold under one rule so many different peoples, each with a different language, and many who are hereditary enemies?"

Hackworth smiled. "Because, Dan, the Unidum is composed of intellectual giants whose methods are clever and admirably efficient. The over-loaded populations of Europe were at the start transferred to North America; the English language became standard in all Unitaria, which is the name for our country; and work was divided wisely and with justice.

"And so, Dan," summarized Hackworth, drawing a long breath, "Nineteen seventy-three is vastly different from forty years ago politically. There was cooperation all over Unitaria when one language became standard and all people had the same privileges and rights, even the sad remnants of the original aggressor nations. In Europe, Dan, the Unitaria-fostered brotherhood had been a few dozen states, each speaking a different language and each jealous of the other, though it was only the traditions of centuries that had kept antagonism alive. Once the Unidum stepped in and painted out boundaries and made them responsible to Unitaria as a whole, those old prejudices evaporated like morning dew in the sun."

DAN had listened, incredulous.

"It all sounds nice enough, Earl. I can hardly credit the same Unidum with passing a law like the one that affects Lila."

Hackworth lowered his voice.

"Naturally, this is no millennium or Utopia. The scientists, who now have a finger in government, are stony-hearted in their zeal for a better world. The Eugenics Law is an example of that."

They fell silent. Hackworth was again worried, and Williams was finding it strange that his return to civilization had precipitated him immediately against law and order—at least one phase of it. . . .

An hour later, Williams looked out to see a strange new world. The Statue of Liberty was still there but the New York skyline was incredibly changed. Buildings had sprouted amazingly with spiderlike spans and vines. It was feverishly unreal. And what were those bees and flies swarming around?

Williams started at a sharp nudge in his ribs.

"Come out of it, man!" Hackworth said.

When they stepped onto the dock, Williams was clutching his rawhide bundle tightly. The customs and passports inspection were rapid and efficient. They were quickly released.

While Williams was staring at the colorful crowds a tall young man immediately strode up to them.

"Terry, my boy!" cried Hackworth. "How are you?"

"Fine. But you—Africa hasn't treated you so well. You are thinner!"

"There are other things," muttered Hackworth. He then presented Williams and explained M'bopo.

Terry Spath was a tall, ruggedly handsome young man of twenty-four, with a splendid muscular development. His calm gray eyes might hide lurking fires. The determined line of his mouth and chin bespoke a sturdy will.

After the introductions, immediately Hackworth looked grave again. Terry touched his arm.

"You still have time to—to see Lila, if we all hurry."

"We *must* see her, must *stop* her!" returned Hackworth.

Terry opened his eyes wide.

"But the summons! If we stop her, the Unidum guards will come after her!"

"We're wasting time," said Williams fiercely. "Let's go after Lila and explain later. You and I, Earl, will go. You, Terry, and my servant must go to your laboratory." He pulled from his pocket a crude clay box. "Make any tests you can of the alcoholic extraction of the vegetable fiber in this box. *Everything depends on that!*"

Williams flung a rapid flood of dialect at M'bopo, while Hackworth gave Terry a hurried explanation of the intended use of the drug.

"Bring her back, then!" cried Terry, and the lurking fires in his eyes flashed to sudden life.

There was a man with spirit, reflected Williams, as he and Hackworth took an escalator to the electro-car station.

To Williams it was all confusion and madness, this New York of 1973, strange, incredible. Bright clothes, great crowds, voices, droning loudspeakers. Yet how subdued was the city noise! The old crashes and bangs and shrill whistles were gone. And where was traffic? He could see none on the ground there. . . . *Sarto!* That wasn't the ground! They were on a sort of aerial highway. Those bees and flies were aircraft!

Hackworth was pointing to an open door on a long, wide enclosed platform. There were comfortable seats inside. They sat down. Williams started as two semi-flexible bands seemed to jump out of nowhere and enfold his thighs and lower chest.

A low whine sobbed through the air. A slight jerk. A feeling of pressure. Past the windows a blur of striated metal swept. Brief glimpses came to Williams from the window of bottomless chasms and leaning heights.

THERE was a swift stop, a complete swing, then more motion that must be blinding speed. *"Je Bru il Bra!"* thought Williams. Forty years of Africa had certainly not prepared him for this supercivilization!

Suddenly he saw Hackworth on his feet and started to jump up, only to find the thigh and chest bands holding him back. Hackworth pressed on the elbow rest with his hand. The stiff bands swung back. They stepped out on a platform, again enclosed like an island in space. Escalators—down to a wide level space that seemed to be the flat roof of a building.

"The air terminal," informed Hackworth.

The level space was a landing field. As they traversed a pedestrian walk bounded by latticework rails, a humming monster fell from the sky not a hundred yards away—a sudden roar of propellers, then people stepped out calm and indifferent.

Hackworth pointed to a huge clock.

"We've got five minutes to find Lila!"

An elevator took them below to the loading platform depot for passengers. Hurried questions to "Information," then Hackworth raced toward the numbered air-liner berths. People were milling, entering the giant flying wing with four engines.

Hackworth frantically searched the crowd. His lips were unconsciously saying "Lila! Lila!" Then he ran forward.

"Lila!"

A girl with magnificent auburn hair turned. Her eyes caught theirs and she stood stock-still. Hackworth ran to her eagerly and embraced her.

"I'm so glad you got here in time to see me before—" Williams heard Lila say.

"Not just to see you," said Hackworth. He looked around nervously. "But to take you back home!"

"Why . . . Oh, no! The summons! I must hurry—the ship leaves in a few minutes."

Hackworth gently pulled her to the wall where the crowd was thin.

"Lila, dear, you're coming with us. Dan Williams here—"

In great surprise Lila extended her hand and flashed him a smile.

"Dan," went on Hackworth in a rapid whisper, "wants you to let him help us all. We've met Terry already—he's waiting."

The girl's face reflected astonishment and indecision.

"But, Father, I must go. I've had three summonses already! They threatened to send guards if I failed to arrive."

"Lila," said Williams, "will you trust me that I can help you and Terry?"

Their eyes met, sturdy blue and limpid brown. Something seemed to emanate from the blue eyes, something that could be trusted.

"Yes, Mr. Williams."

"Lead the way," Williams said quickly to Hackworth. "Terry's laboratory."

CHAPTER IV

Flight from Matrimony

AN electro-car took them to the suburban plant of the food products Branch E, where Terry worked as a chemist. Williams was surprised that suburban New York had hardly changed at all in comparison to the downtown business section. It looked familiar here.

When they descended to the street

[*Turn page*]

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level he saw pavements and residences, such as he had seen when he was eighteen. But he merely had to look up at the electro-car gathering tremendous speed, a long silver needle in the distance, to realize that it was 1973.

Hackworth led the way to the long, low plant and opened the door. They passed down a long hallway and stopped before a closed door where Hackworth knocked.

Terry's voice came to them. "Come in."

He was standing before a bench covered with glassware and bottled materials. In his rubber-gloved hand he held a test-tube half filled with a delicate green solution.

Terry turned, and his eyes lighted as he went toward Lila with outstretched arms. They clung to each other mutely. Williams quietly closed the door and turned a key in the lock. Terry had been alone in the room, and secrecy was vital.

"Terry," said Lila, gently extricating herself from his arms, "why are we all here in your laboratory?"

"I hardly know myself. Mr. Williams—"

Hackworth interrupted. "I'll explain. Dan conceived a plan for keeping Lila from being married to a Unidum scientist and convinced me that it was worth a trial. But the final decision rests between you and Lila, Terry. Dan, tell about the drug."

Williams pointed to the opened clay box on the bench, half-filled with a dry, flaky material like rough-cut tobacco.

"What did you find out about it?" he asked Terry.

"Well, the time has been short and the tests simple, but it is related to narcotics like opium and morphine. It should produce a sleep state. But it has a reaction that puzzles me. Is it widely distributed in Africa, Mr. Williams?"

"No. The man who collected that vegetable flake told me that it is a rare plant, existing only in central Congo. He planned to carry a lot of it back to civilization and test its narcotic principle. His name was D'Lawoef."

"D'Lawoef!" echoed Terry excitedly. "Well-known physiologist of two generations ago! Did he tell you anything more?"

"He said it would produce a comatose state in any living being for periods of time depending on the dose," said Williams. "Not a dream state or semi-consciousness like opium, but complete repose. There is no common antidote according to D'Lawoef. He knew that because he tried it on a native and failed to rouse him. He believed that probably there is no antidote, for it is a remarkable substance."

Terry nodded. He held up a small flask holding a colorless liquid.

"Here it is in a ten-to-one alcohol and water solution—ready for injection!"

So Terry would not hesitate to take the gamble! But Lila? Her eyes showed bewilderment.

"Lila," Williams said, "an injection of that liquid will put you into a coma or induced sleep. Then we will inform the Unidum that you are strangely unconscious and cannot therefore be married. What they will do we can't say, but it will prevent your forced marriage. After that, we will see if that can be turned aside altogether."

"Oh, I—I don't dare!" she said. She added quickly: "Not because I'm afraid for myself, but because the Unidum will make things miserable for you three."

The men looked at one another.

"For our love's sake, take it, Lila!" Terry urged. "If the Unidum does find out, I'll take the blame! It must be *my* responsibility. Lila, darling, take the drug! It may bring us together in the future!"

Lila threw herself into his arms in consent.

"When will the Unidum begin finding out that Lila has disobeyed the summons?" asked Williams.

"Possibly tonight. The summons demanded Lila's appearance at the Unidum Subheadquarters in Philadelphia before eight P.M. By nine or ten, they will begin to lose patience."

"It's now six," said Williams, while

the others waited, unconsciously accepting his leadership. The same dominance in his character that had made him chieftain and sole ruler of a thousand natives in Africa was making itself felt.

"We'll all go to your home now, Earl," he said tersely. "We'll give Lila the drug, then wait for the authorities to make the next move."

"I have my car outside," said Terry.

TERRY made a package of the solution and a hypodermic needle, locking the rest of the vegetable fiber in a cabinet. They left the laboratory, and M'bopo followed them silently.

Terry opened the door of a sleek, satin-finished automobile whose long body seemed to flow in ripples from a blunt rear apex. To Williams it looked like the futuristic advertisements of forty years ago come true. The smooth purr of a powerful motor was uninterrupted by shifting gears as the vehicle glided forward with magical ease.

During the half-hour drive from the laboratory to the Hackworth home, little was said. Their nerves were tense. Williams took in the passing scenery with an eager eye. Change—change. Forty years of it, a lifetime of it. Yet here and there some sections were startlingly familiar. Pedestrians walked leisurely, even indolently. The tempo of city life had apparently decreased. Even the cars, except theirs, crawled along as though the drivers had all the time in the world.

Finally they entered a section of tree-shaded avenues lined with bungalows and small mansions. The dwellings were spaced widely and exhibited individual styles. At least 1973 had brought something invigorating in residential architecture. Stereotyped standards had been abolished.

Terry halted the car before a small, neat bungalow surrounded by hedges, flower patches, and wide lawns.

The interior was luxurious, almost lavish, but homelike. The furniture was a blend of elegance and comfort. A manservant took the suitcases.

Dinner was immediately served, and Lila displayed her sparkling spirit during the meal, despite the chill thought of what would transpire later.

Williams ate mechanically, deep in thought. At the end of the meal, he suddenly looked up and said:

"There's something more about the drug I haven't mentioned."

"Let's all go into the living room," put in Hackworth.

When they had made themselves comfortable, Williams said:

"D'Lawoef mentioned that he had found the natives using the drug. The medicine men use it to induce restful sleep in fevers and painful sicknesses. The Frenchman also claimed that the person under the influence of the drug could be made to respond to impressions given just before the coma overtook him—something like hypnotism, I suppose. If we could be sure of that we could impress on Lila's brain the suggestion not to awaken until somebody's voice, Terry's preferably, commanded her to!"

"But what would be the purpose of that?" queried Terry.

"In case the Unidum sends doctors to revive her—who might succeed. But the hypnosis ought to last longer than the drug, according to D'Lawoef."

"But how can we test that now?" asked Hackworth. "Time is getting short—a quarter to eight!"

Williams shifted his eyes to M'bopo who sat cross-legged on the rug, and spoke softly in Bantu dialect. The black man's expression became frightened. Sharp words changed it to resignation. M'bopo muttered, and bowed his head.

"M'bopo is my voluntary slave," Williams informed them. "Get the hypodermic, Terry. Give him the smallest dose conceivable."

Terry opened his package in which was a sterilizing solution as well as the drug and hypodermic. He dipped the needle, wiped it with cotton, and drew in a drop. M'bopo bared his arm. Terry plunged the needle in and pushed the plunger.

Immediately Williams waved him back and began to speak slowly and emphatically in dialect, gazing into the black man's eyes. The others watched intently.

A film came over M'bopo's eyes and they dropped shut. Williams caught his tumbling body and set it in a chair.

"That small dose ought to be ineffective in fifteen minutes," he said. "Then we'll see."

WHEN the clock struck eight, Williams asked Hackworth to shake M'bopo and command him in dialect to awake. But no amount of shaking or talking brought any change to the senseless African. Then Williams motioned his cousin away.

"*Umo gaak,* M'bopo!"

The eyelids fluttered and flicked open. M'bopo looked up with a sigh of relief.

"Then it works!" cried Terry.

"Not conclusively," amended Williams. "The dose might have been just enough to keep him asleep until after Hackworth tried to awaken him. But it gives us a reasonable hope that Lila can be put into a coma from which only one person can awaken her—Terry. So—"

At a clicking sound echoing through the room, Williams stopped.

"The Unidum radio signal!" cried Hackworth. "It is more than likely about Lila!"

"Then listen," Williams said rapidly. "Lila is strangely sick, has been in a coma for the past few hours. You are about to call a doctor."

Hackworth placed himself before a projecting mouthpiece in the wall, surrounded by a carved frame of gilt metal. He tripped one of two levers beside it, which would throw the incoming voice through the room; the other lever would have brought the voice through a receiver hanging on a hook just below the mouthpiece—for private conversations.

"Hackworth speaking."

"Unidum calling. Eugenics Bureau." The voice was peremptory, commanding. "Your daughter Lila has failed to appear at the subheadquarters in Philadelphia, as specified in the third and final summons of three days ago. What have you to say?"

"I am sorry. I—I—"

Williams gripped his cousin's hand tightly. Hackworth spoke more firmly.

"My daughter has inexplicably—er—become ill this afternoon. She is in a coma and nothing seems to awaken her."

"What?" came sternly from the diaphragm on the wall. "Is this some trick?"

"No," said Hackworth, playing his part with more assurance. "My daughter has not been well for days. She simply collapsed and has failed to awaken."

"Have you a doctor?"

"No, but I was just going to—"

"Never mind," interrupted the voice. "We will send our choice of doctors, since your daughter is legally under the authority of the Unidum's Bureau of Eugenics." A click and the voice was gone.

Hackworth wiped a perspiring brow. "You see, Williams, what the Unidum is like? There'll be a doctor from them here inside of an hour. He will—"

"We must hurry," interrupted Williams. He looked into the girl's eyes and said: "Lila, are you ready?"

Without a word, she kissed Terry, then bared her arm. Terry filled the hypodermic needle and slowly brought it closer to her arm, trembling in every limb. Lila caught his eye and silently commanded him to go ahead.

Then it was done, and Terry was holding her close, looking into her eyes, was saying over and over:

"Wake up only at my command, darling . . ."

Three days after Lila Hackworth had been given the mysterious narcotic, Dan Williams sat before a two-foot oval screen in his cousin's home with the shades down so that the television images would be clear. M'bopo sat beside him, the whites of his eyes gleaming eerily in the ghost-light of faintly illuminated dial controls.

Talking and singing figures became involved in a stirring intrigue of the year in which the rising Unidum régime had startled a whole world. The sound effects which seemed to come from every corner of the room were perfection, for television in the home had long since become perfect.

When the drama ended, Williams brought to the screen a race between a rocket auto and a rocket train on tracks. He was awed when the announcer revealed that the event was taking place at that identical moment near Berlin.

THE front door slammed and Hackworth came in.

"That drug is all you said it was, Dan," he declared. "Lila is sleeping as sweetly as a child. The doctors are stumped. They asked me a hundred questions and I kept looking heartbroken. It was great!" He seemed in great good humor.

"Did they seem suspicious?" asked Williams.

"Well, when I mentioned having just returned from Africa, the three doctors looked at each other significantly. I know what they figured. Sleeping sickness! Transmitted from me as a passive carrier. They'll work at that angle, and get more puzzled. Dan, my heart sank the other night when the Unidum doctor ordered Lila removed to the Eugenics Bureau's own hospital. I thought sure they would waken her, but now—"

"D'Lawoef was right after all, Earl. Is she in good hands—being fed properly, and so on?"

"The Unidum doctors and hospitals are the pride of medical science, Dan. They'll take perfect care of her."

"The next move," said Williams, "will be ours. Terry will be here tonight. We'll talk it over then. Right now, suppose you tell me a few things I haven't had a chance to find out. Up until now it's been hustle and bustle and rush and run. I have only the vaguest idea of what sort of world I'm living in."

"Come into the living room," said Hackworth.

NEXT ISSUE
THE OSMOTIC THEOREM
A Novelet by S. P. MEEK
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CHAPTER V

The Unidum

PASSING through the lounge on the way to the living room, Williams and Hackworth found M'bopo twisting the television dials with reverent hands, and staring at the screen in fascination. Williams grinned at him and told him to play the set all he wanted to. He went on with his cousin.

"First of all," said Williams when they were seated in the living room and had lighted cigars, "tell me about yourself, Earl. We've been together for days and I still don't know what your life has been in the past forty years or how you came to find me in the heart of Africa."

"Well," said Hackworth, "exploration has occupied most of my life. It runs in the family. In the frightful cosmic struggle of the All-Nations War I was an officer in the United States Air Force and, God help me, I have seen too many shellings—thousands and thousands of people, Dan, exterminated like rats in hours!"

He passed a hand across his eyes and shuddered.

"I'm trying to forget that war—I never can! I was a surveyor for new sites for cities in America. Millions were shipped over from starving, exhausted Europe and put to work in the new cities.

"That was the beginning of reconstruction—post-war rejuvenation. When my requests were finally granted I was commissioned an explorer. I've been in dozens of out-of-the-way corners of the world. I married, but my wife died in bearing Lila.

"One thing you must know, Dan—I never forgot you and your father. But knowing Africa as you do, especially the Congo—but *not* knowing the Unidum Exploration Bureau—you may not understand why I tried to reach you only twice, and twice failed. Three years ago

I discovered a rich deposit of platinum ores in Siberia. My rewards made me independent, so I was able to search for a north route, and finally penetrated to you. I had little hope of seeing any of your father's expedition alive, so you may imagine my joy when I saw a white man and learned it was you.

"That's my life, Dan. I could sit the rest of my days in an armchair, if I wanted to. But I'm planning on trying the Amazon again now."

Williams smiled. "I understand. The fire in your blood that has been in the Williams line since the discovery of America, the same urge that sent my father and myself into the Congo forty years ago." He grew thoughtful. "Speaking of wealth, Earl, is there as much unrest between labor and the capitalists today as there used to be?"

Hackworth shrugged. "There is no such thing as capitalism today! The Unidum controls transportation, communication, and food. All other industries are under Unidum sponsorship, too, in a lesser degree. The average standard of living is high in Unitaria. Our 'rich' would have been considered paupers to the money barons of forty years ago, but our 'poor' never face want nor privation."

Williams was surprised. "Then the Unidum has done good work."

"Yes, Dan, more good than evil. But there are sad mistakes made, like the Eugenics Law. Still the basic idea of that law is worthy."

"But forcing women into loveless marriages, is inhuman!" protested Williams. "Sacrifice of personal happiness for future benefits to the state is just what an emotionless scientist would think of! Earl, just how do those scientists figure in the Unidum?"

"Well, the term 'scientist' is applied only to a man of knowledge who has proved himself. Usually he must perform some brilliant intellectual work, for which he receives the special privileges accorded men of science. The Unidum is composed of two equal-powered executives, two lawmaking bodies, two judicial systems, and a long line of bureaus. One-half of the government is in the hands of scientists. One of the executives is a scientist; one of the legislative bodies is the House of Scientists; one of the judicial systems is the Science Court; and many of the Bureaus are purely scientific in nature—as the Eugenics Bureau."

"And the resulting government?"

"Has made Unitaria a supercivilization. For the first time in history, the intellectual forces have become the governing power. In the past, it had always been the ruthless, hereditary, and selfish forces. The Unidum is the first experiment in a rule of *reason* as opposed to a rule of *might*."

"But the Eugenics Law," commented Williams, disconcerted by such high praise of the Unidum. "There is no excuse for that."

HACKWORTH waved a hand noncommittally.

"Enough for a while," he said. "It's dinner time."

Terry arrived after dinner. Hackworth told him what had occurred at the hospital.

"By the way," he said hesitantly, "I met the scientist that Lila—er—was to have married. Professor Jorgen, a biologist. He was nice enough, except for his overbearing air of self-importance—something Lila could never have endured. He assured me he would do all in his power to see that she was cured. He was all confidence."

Terry's lips tightened. "The very thought of any man touching her while she lies helpless—" he growled angrily.

"I know how you feel, Terry," interrupted Hackworth. "I'm glad I didn't take you along, though, for you'd have been sure to get into trouble."

"Professor Jorgen," said Terry, frowning darkly. "I'll make him wish he'd never heard of Lila Hackworth."

"But the Unidum would make you wish you'd never met Jorgen," Hackworth said drily. "Besides, you know perfectly well that if anything happened to Jorgen, Lila would be given to another scientist."

"Just a minute," Williams said firmly. "We want to plan for the future, not discuss violence. Now, in brief, Lila is lost to Terry under the Eugenics Law, but she is in such a state the Unidum cannot force her marriage to a scientist. We are reasonably sure she will not awaken till Terry himself commands her to, and she will be well taken care of. There are only two possibilities as I see it. Strings must be pulled to release Lila from the Eugenics Law, or she must be spirited away to a foreign land."

"The first is practically impossible," said Hackworth.

"Why?" countered Williams. "You've got money, haven't you? You can bribe officials and buy out opposition."

"Once," Hackworth said, "bribery and graft were a flourishing trade. But the Unidum, with its ideals, is adamant to corruption. Money wouldn't take the dot off an *i* in any Unidum records!"

"Are there any influential men who would help you for the sake of friendship?"

"Doubtful," muttered Hackworth.

"Would it do any good to appeal to a court?"

Hackworth and Terry exchanged wan smiles.

"That would be like taking meat from a hungry lion and offering it dried biscuits," said Hackworth. "You see, Dan, most of the women confiscated by the Eugenics Law take it philosophically. They are treated well, their husbands are influential and respected—courts would laugh at the petition to grant one girl a release because she loves another man."

"Yet you, Earl, and Terry, *you* would not laugh."

"I should say not!" declared Terry vehemently. "I've never believed the Eugenics Law was right. Women should have a free choice."

"I agree heartily," said Hackworth.

"Well," said Williams, "since neither bribery nor friendship will release Lila, the only possibility left is—"

"Wait!" cried Hackworth suddenly. "I have a close friend in Long Island who might . . . At least I can talk to him about it. He is secretary to Executive Ashley."

"Who?"

"One of the two executives of the Unidum, corresponding to the president of a democracy. The scientist executive is Professor Molier. Ashley, the other, is not a scientist."

"That's worth a trial," said Williams.

"We can't bank on it too much," Hackworth added gloomily. "Dan, you have no idea of the efficiency and—and impregnability of the Unidum."

"You've said that before," drawled Williams. "But I, for one, will battle the whole iron system for Lila's sake. We've halted the Unidum decree for a time. Why lose heart?"

"I'm with you!" cried Terry.

"And so am I," said Hackworth.

"In Africa," said Williams, "when surrounded by Zulus, I hunted until I found a weak point. Then I sent through a body of my best Bantu warriors to fall on their backs. More than once we beat off an enemy five times our strength. We must find the Unidum's weak point, if any. If not, we must resort to flight. Terry, just go about your work until you get a call from us. . . ."

THE airport where Hackworth kept another private Sansrun plane was a mile from his home. On a warm and pleasant September day Hackworth and Williams walked toward it, with M'bopo a faithful shadow. Now and then an automobile purred smoothly by, shining in the bright sun. Overhead an occasional plane droned alone. Far to the left sped an electro-car like an enlarged needle.

"Somehow," said Williams, "this just seems like nineteen-thirty-three caricatured by a clever artist. I can still see the old city behind all this. Maybe I was dreaming when I stepped from the hypmarine and thought I saw Manhattan Island overgrown with a strange architecture."

Hackworth smiled. "Downtown *has* been almost completely rebuilt, but the rest of New York has stayed pretty much the same. The same has happened in all big cities of Unitaria. Similarly, complete though the change has been in government and state affairs, social life has not changed to a great extent. People still play and sing and gossip. There are still theaters, movies, parties, banquets, and idle recreation—perhaps too much of that with the short working week. We still have our foibles, pet peeves, petty faults, and idiosyncrasies. Forty years has not greatly changed human nature."

The airport was small, but Hackworth explained that it was only one of hundreds spread through the residence sections for private craft.

Then Hackworth's ship came from the hanger, a fair-sized one with twin motors. They climbed into it. Its front was of flawless glass. The controls, rear fins and all, were embodied in a driving wheel and foot throttle.

Hackworth took altitude with the carelessness of experience. At a thousand feet, he tripped a small lever on the control panel.

To their ears came a faint staccato tapping above the muffled engine buzz. Hackworth swung to one side until the noise became louder and less shrill. Suddenly there was a chorus of new sounds with a regular rhythm. He began a swift climb. Another series of fluted notes and he leveled out. At five thousand feet he relaxed.

"You see, Dan," he explained, "one must fly carefully around New York, or any big city. The air is divided into zones and lanes for different types of craft. Those sounds are lane signals. By means of them, an experienced flyer can fly with his eyes closed. They tell me what lane I'm in, where to turn, where to rise or descend and what speed limit to observe."

While in the lane, the noises went on regularly and not unpleasantly.

Hackworth pointed to striped ships that they passed at long intervals.

"Air-traffic police."

The traffic became heavy as they approached downtown New York. A steady stream of small Sansrun craft flowed by. A thousand feet up darted larger ships with multiple engines. High above in endless rows were passenger ships bound for, or returning to, distant cities. Hackworth made another ascent when the signals fluted, and leveled at nine thousand feet. From this viewpoint Williams could see a geometric pattern of air-traffic spread over New York like a fisher's shimmering net.

They followed a weaving course that circled them past the southern edge of downtown New York. From this height it looked more unreal than it had from the ground, Williams reflected. He had a mental picture of 1933 New York in his mind, which he compared with what his eyes saw in 1973. Downtown crawled inward considerably, had become less spired, and had fallen victim of a Titanic spider which had spun an intricate web between the interstices of buildings.

Hackworth piloted the ship in the Long Island lane.

"The Unidum capitol," he said, pointing downward.

WILLIAMS gasped in sheer astonishment. On the western side of the East River was a large group of magnificent buildings of glass and shining metal, glittering in the sun with blinding intensity. They covered acres of ground, majestic structures that could have been touched with the inspired finger of a futuristic artist. It was a hive of activity, aircraft rising and descending, autos creeping like ants, and tiny dots entering and leaving the various buildings.

"So there is the place where the destiny of half a billion souls is centered," commented Williams. He suddenly realized forcefully just what a gargantuan state Unitaria was—the old United States, Canada, Mexico, then over to the Old World—Britain Germany, huge Russia, others. It seemed impossible in scope.

Hackworth began to maneuver downward when they had passed the Unidum capitol. He sped the plane finally two thousand feet above ground. Long

Island City clustered halfway between the two tips of its namesake island. It had been taken over simultaneously with the founding of the capitol and now was purely a residence city for the tens of thousands of Unidum employees. It had, therefore, been arranged with an eye for beauty. From the air it gave the impression of a sleepy Mid-western town that had grown to a city without changing its rural aspect. Thousands of picturesque bungalows and low apartment hotels dotted the carpet of lush green grass, and endless rows of trees lent it a quiet, woodland air.

CHAPTER VI

An Enslaved Brain

LANDING at one of the small airports in Long Island City, Hackworth left the plane in charge of the hangar attendants. A half-mile walk down shady avenues brought them before a stucco dwelling.

Williams was introduced to the man who answered the doorbell—Andrew Grant, secretary to Executive Ashley of the Unidum. He was a short, slight man of fifty, bald and spectacled. His sonorous voice seemed out of keeping with his physique as he conducted his visitors to the lounge. Hackworth did not delay in coming to the point.

"Andrew," he said, "I've dropped in on you for a purpose."

Grant lifted bushy eyebrows.

"It's about Lila," said Hackworth. "She has taken the Eugenics Test and found to be the type needed."

"I was sorry when I heard that," said Grant quickly. "Lila is a wonderful girl. And young Terry—I suppose he's broken-hearted?"

"Naturally. None of us felt any too pleased about—" He paused, then said hastily: "Andrew, you will hold anything I say in utmost confidence?"

"Surely. You know me well enough for that."

"Well, Lila is in a condition preventing her marriage. While this *impasse* holds, young Terry Spath, Mr. Williams here, and I are going to try to save Lila from the Eugenics Law. I have come to you hoping you may be able to help."

Grant had suddenly turned grave. He looked hastily about as though fearing eavesdroppers. This was treason talk.

"What do you mean?" he breathed.

"Isn't there any possible way to annul the Unidum decree?" asked Hackworth, his voice pleading.

There was a pause before Grant answered. His eyes avoided his friend.

"Well—Earl, really it's unheard of! Unidum decrees are not subject to repeal. You should know that."

Hackworth threw a glance of helplessness at Williams. He heaved a weary sigh.

"I know that, Andrew. But you can't blame me for trying. A father's heart prompts me. Suppose your daughter, Elaine, loved a young man and—" Grant's face suddenly paling checked him.

Grant came to his feet and paced up and down, then he whirled.

"You're right, Earl," he said tensely. "Elaine will have to take the test soon. She has met a young man . . . That Eugenics Law—a thousand curses on it! I've always hated it. And you and I are not the only ones. It is one of the worst mistakes the Unidum has ever made. I'd like to help you, Earl, if . . . Is Lila ill?"

Hackworth told the whole story then, while the surprised Grant looked at Williams with a new interest. When Hackworth finished, Grant spoke impulsively.

"I'm going to do my level best to help Lila. I've got connections in the Unidum that may, or may not, result in her release. I'm not underestimating the task. As far as I know, no woman has ever been released from the Eugenics Law, but there is a first time for everything. Give me a week's time to do some guarded investigation."

"If only Lila doesn't awaken in that

time," muttered Hackworth.

"She won't," interposed Williams quickly. "Call it jungle instinct, but I'm certain only Terry's voice can bring her back."

Hackworth arose and gripped Grant's hand in silent gratitude. . . .

The next day Hackworth decided to show his cousin something of the internal workings of the modern New York.

"Dan," he said, "one of the reasons the standard of living is so high now is because machines do a great deal of the world's work. Unitaria, especially, is a highly specialized civilization. What work is left is easily accomplished by a maximum working week of thirty hours, and the total production is so great that there is more than enough for the comfort of all. I'll take you to see the machines in various industries."

USING electro-car transportation, they spent a whole day going around New York. Williams lost himself in wonder. Factories were large, clean establishments crammed with a bewildering maze of machines, tended by humans who looked puny and futile beside them. Tireless metallic moving parts twinkled up and down and in and out. Finished products spewed forth in steady streams into automatic receivers that carried them away for packing and distribution.

How efficient and quiet it all was! No clanging and banging and ear-splitting discordance of ponderous machinery of forty years ago. Engineers had practically eliminated unnecessary noises. A smell of pleasantly perfumed oils and lubricants hovered near the machines. The comfort of the attendants had been thought of to the last degree.

The workers seemed cheerful. All were neatly uniformed. There was no suggestion of old-time sweaty, grimy, ill-ventilated, gloomy, screeching machine-rooms.

Their final stop was at the food products Branch E, where Terry worked. The Unidum had long ago taken over all food products, so important to humanity. Branch E produced only one thing—a vitaminized powder which went into all foods in Unitaria.

Terry took them through the plant. He brought them first before a series of seven apparatuses that seemed to be a hybrid between an enlarged clock-work and a chemical laboratory. Pumps drove colored liquids through thick quartz tubes; misted gases swirled violently in transparent chambers; huge rollers ground in flat pans containing heaps of lumped materials.

"These seven machines," exclaimed Terry, "are the initial steps in the manufacture of the seven vitamins needed in a balanced diet. Into them the raw products are fed through those chutes, starting the building of the intricate vitamin molecules. Before the new compounds undergo further chemical reaction, they are tested by analysts."

The next room also housed seven machines, but vastly different. These were a conglomerate of millions of tubes, retorts, boiling liquids, and swirling solutions.

"Here," said Terry, "the molecules are further rearranged toward the ultimate vitamin molecules. Rigid tests are performed. Batches now and then have to be thrown out."

In each room were new and strange apparatuses. Hundreds tended them and took out samples for testing. Yet, strangely enough, no one actually seemed to have anything to do with the machinery. In the other industries there had always been men before control-boards. Here the machines went on endlessly as though having been once started, there could be no fluctuation in their production.

"These machines are marvelous," Williams remarked. "Are they built so perfectly that no interference with them is necessary?"

"They used to have control-boards," answered Terry, "but five years ago this plant was outfitted with a controlling mechanism that replaced human attendance. Only when a part wears out or breaks down, must a human being use his hands."

"What sort of astounding control

mechanism can that be?"

"I'll show you."

But Hackworth made them pause.

"Let's pass that up," he said in an oddly hurried voice. "It's—er—look how late it is. We must get home for dinner."

"Dinner can wait!" cried Williams, and he turned to Terry, but the chemist seemed perturbed. A covert look passed between him and Hackworth.

"Perhaps you'd rather—go home to dinner," said Terry.

Williams looked from one to the other.

"Well, what is it?" he asked quietly.

Terry looked helplessly at Hackworth. "I'm sorry. I should have thought—"

"Never mind, Terry," Hackworth said. "We could not have withheld it indefinitely, anyway. Dan, the controlling mechanism for all these machines is—*a brain. A human brain!*"

WILLIAMS almost staggered.

"Sarto je Bru!" he gasped. "A *living brain?*"

"No!" Hackworth said rapidly. "Not in the true sense of the word, but—" He broke off and began again. "A brain taken from a dead body and rejuvenated so that it can still perform mental tasks. Technically, I don't suppose anybody can explain how it's done, except the Scientists."

"The Scientists again!" burst out Williams. "It sounds as inhuman as the Eugenics Law." He breathed deeply as though controlling violent emotions. "Let's go and see it," he said quietly.

Terry led the way to the floor above where rooms contained stores of chemicals. In the exact center of the building was a circular chamber from which came the sound of clicking.

They stepped in and onto a platform surrounded by a railing. A neon sign above read:

VISITORS MUST NOT SMOKE

The sight that met Williams' eyes brought an involuntary cry of amazement to his lips. The entire wall-surface, with the exception of the part near the doorway, was taken up by an unbroken control-board with thousands of relays—tiny contact magnets, and pilot lights. There was a constant ticking and twinkling of the tiny globes. Across the ceiling stretched innumerable wires to the affair in the center of the room.

This object riveted Williams' gaze. It consisted of a cylindrical solid base of metal surmounted by an intricate system of mirrors and tubes. But topping that was another object that brought a quick contraction to Williams' brow—a circular glass globe suspended from the ceiling by a thick rod of metal. From it led thousands of fine silver wires, which connected to the mirrored mechanism below. From the globe two thin tubes ran parallel to black metal box on the floor.

"The brain!" murmured Williams.

He could faintly make out the irregular outline of a grayish object suspended in a viscid liquid in the globe.

Terry began softly explaining, for Williams would ask about it.

"The brain is suspended in a nutritive fluid which is pumped up and down those two tubes from the black box that contains which might be called a mechanical heart. The mirrors and photo-electric tubes are the 'eyes' of the brain, with which it examines the readings of the gauges next to the wall relays. By some intricate system of semi-nerve control, it operates the various relays and switches which keep the machines below running smoothly and regularly."

"How can one brain control so many machines, when it would take dozens of attendants otherwise?"

"Because every cell of the brain is used. In life we never use the full capacity of our brains. Much of it lies dormant, subconscious."

"Surely the brain can't do anything if a part breaks down?"

"No. The brain merely controls the power input and product output, and takes care of variations. If the raw product put into any one machine happens to be especially hard to grind into powder, the Brain-control automatically adjusts the timing. But whenever repairs are needed, the Brain-control merely flashes a signal to the central office where the official in charge sends a repairman. Sometimes for days all the machines operate without human hands, except for routine testing."

Dan Williams, suddenly sickened, turned away. The mere thought of a human brain that had been in a living body perched up there like a frosty, evil eye, turned him cold. This thing! Hanging there, fed by a mechanical heart! He shuddered.

They all went to the Hackworth home for dinner, all feeling depressed and subdued. Afterward they smoked and talked desultory fashion, but Williams resolutely avoided all reference to the Brain-control, a gruesome thing to be so suddenly revealed to a man from an age when even vivisection was not countenanced by many.

THEN Hackworth turned deathly white, for Williams had just asked a question Hackworth had hoped he never would.

"Where was my sister Helen buried?"

Seeing his cousin's face in a flash, Williams' keen mind seared to a horrible conclusion. His eyes bored into Hackworth's, and Earl Hackworth knew those steady blue eyes would detect the slightest sign of prevarication. "Don't—*don't* ask me that!" he screamed.

"I want to know," said Williams implacably. "The truth."

Hackworth waved a hand that said, "Then I have no choice." And in a choked voice he said aloud: "Helen's body was cremated by the Unidum, after her brain was removed and—"

"Helen's brain!" cried Williams, his face working. He trailed off into muttered Bantu dialect. Hackworth sat there in abject misery. He had prayed that this need never come to light, but had known it was inevitable.

He waited for his bronzed cousin to break out in violent anger, as he had at the cold-blooded Eugenics Law. But when Williams spoke, his voice was quiet, ominously controlled.

CHAPTER VII

Terrible Revelation

NODDING, as he caught a sign from Hackworth, Terry began to speak, for he was more familiar with the scientific aspects of the modern world than the explorer.

"Just five years ago, Mr. Williams," the young chemist explained, "a Scientist whose name is unknown succeeded in an experiment upon which he had been working for years. He announced that it was possible to take the brain from a person immediately after death, and bring back to it a semblance of life, a semi-subconscious existence. This rejuvenated brain could exert its full intellectual resources, if given a mechanical contact with the living world.

"Immediately the Scientists saw a use for such a dead-alive brain—a substitute for a group of living brains. The Unidum decided to use them for the benefit of the state."

"Why?" asked Williams. "Already working hours are short. If the Brain-control can take the place of fifty workers, it means little."

Terry nodded. "But suppose *all* machines were given Brain-control! That would release millions of workers, cut the working week to twelve or fifteen hours."

"And everybody would die of boredom," Williams snorted. "Earl tells me the people of Unitaria hardly know what to do with their leisure time now. What possible advantage would *more* leisure be?"

Terry shook his head. "The Unidum has been rather secretive about motives. At present there are only about two thousand Brain-controls in Unitaria, and the only machines fitted with them are the food products systems. But I've heard, confidentially, that the Unidum is determined to increase the use of them."

"But why?" repeated Williams, and

quoted, "'Idle hands do mischief make.'"

"Dan," said Hackworth defiantly, "the Unidum has ruled wisely for years, always with an eye to the future. They *must* have plans to balance the shifting amounts of work and leisure."

Williams sprang to his feet and strode up and down the room.

"Somehow," he muttered, "there seems to be something sinister behind it. Can the Unidum be retrograding, as all systems of government in history have done after reaching a peak?"

Hackworth and Terry shot guarded glances at one another. Dan Williams was putting into words things that were not breathed in Unitaria. Hackworth, in upholding the Unidum, had merely been trying to take his cousin's mind from his sister.

"And what is the public attitude toward the Brain-controls?" demanded Williams bitterly. "If the public dares to have an attitude in this day of scientific dictatorship."

"The workers who tend machines," Hackworth told him, "see a day when everyone will be his own master. But to tell the truth, there has been much disapproval from those who believe it is sacrilegious to—to disturb the dead, as you also believe."

"And as *you* do!" said Williams quickly.

"Yes, as I do," admitted Hackworth soberly.

"Terry," said Williams, facing the chemist, "what more can you tell me about the brain that is used like a piece of supersensitive machinery? To control machinery it must *think*, and if it thinks it is not really *dead*, and it must have emotion or consciousness."

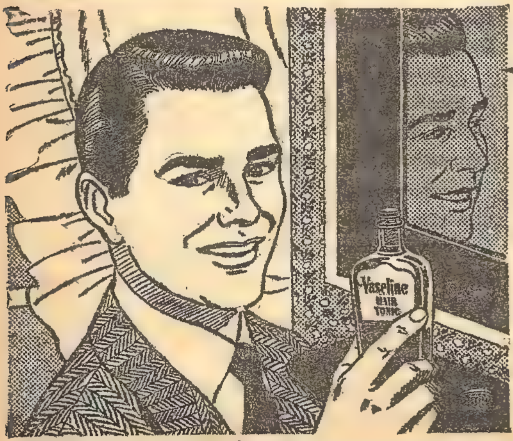
Hackworth remonstrated, but Terry answered the demand in Williams' eyes.

"Yes, they *do* feel!" he cried, and faced the father of the girl he loved despairingly. "Mr. Hackworth, there's no use holding anything back. Nothing can be denied. I'll tell him all!"

[*Turn page*]

oh-oh, Dry Scalp!

"SAM'S nice, but he'd be a lot nicer if he did something about that Dry Scalp! His hair is dull and unruly—and he has loose dandruff, too! I've got just the ticket for him—'Vaseline' Hair Tonic!"



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HACKWORTH slumped back in his chair.

"The brains do feel!" repeated Terry, his eyes on Williams. "Enough to make it purgatory for them! *They* know, and *they* live in an endless torment! I'm constantly tortured by the thought of that sentient brain upstairs, sending impulses through cold silver wires, directing dozens of complicated machines. It cannot rebel! But it can remember life, can know pain, weariness, despair, futile anger. Two Scientists investigated and proved it. They were not blinded by scientific zeal, but when they attempted to tell the world, the Unidum hounded them, drove them out, perhaps killed them—no one knows. What they had learned leaked out, but only a few, like myself, believe them. The rest are content to think of the Brain-controls as organic machinery, and to believe the Unidum which promises a time when everybody will work only a few hours. They forget the misery of the brains! They forget that for everyone there can be no more 'Rest in Peace' now!"

Hackworth was astonished at Terry's emotional outburst. He had never realized that the young chemist had such a violent antipathy for the Brain-control innovation.

But Williams' reaction was fearful to see. Livid fire shot from his eyes. His lips twisted. Zulus had seen that expression and turned ashen under their black skin. It was a compound of mighty rage and purple hatred. Terry shivered as he saw powerful shoulders knot into corded muscles under the man's shirt.

Suddenly Williams relaxed. He glanced at the other two men apologetically.

"Earl," he asked, "how did they come to use Helen's—brain?"

"It was just at the time the first Brain-controls were made that Helen died. The brains of those who died on a certain day were conscripted by the Unidum. They were 'honored' in being the first to initiate that 'great advancement in science.' There were riots that day—friends and relatives of the 'honored' deceased. But the Unidum did not see then that it had made its greatest mistake in authorizing the use of Brain-controls. It does not see it now, nor care to see it."

"Has there been no organized opposition?"

"Not as yet, although feeling has run high at times."

"*Sarto!*" exclaimed Williams. "An inhuman, cold-blooded, repulsive scientific horror like that and nothing is done! And the Eugenics Law, also inhuman, and there are no people of spirit to revolt."

"Revolt? The Unidum is all-powerful—practically a dictatorship. And to the Scientists the Eugenics Law and the Brain-control are laudable advancements. What can you expect the masses to do when the Unidum has given them benefits never known on earth before? I've told you, Dan, the Unidum has done far more good than harm."

"The mere thought of Helen—" said Williams. "Where is the Brain-control which—"

"I don't know."

"You do!"

Hackworth sweated under the adamant demand of his cousin, then whispered:

"Boston."

"Then I'm going to Boston! If it's the last act of my life, I'm going to see that my sister's—brain dies its proper death!"

"You're mad!"

"Do you think I could live in peace, or *die* in peace, knowing that all that is still conscious of Helen, lies in perpetual torment?"

"But there is nothing you can do! It's been tried before." Hackworth turned with pleading to the young chemist. "You tell him, Terry!"

"That's right, Mr. Williams," said Terry. "You could do nothing."

"I can wreck the whole control."

"Even if you break all the contacts and smash the mirror-eyes," returned Terry, "the brain does not die. As long as the nutritive fluid surrounds it, it lives. You can't harm that because the mechanical heart is enclosed in heavy steel. No key will open its lock except the one in the hands of the Scientist who renews the fluid periodically. The pipes leading upward are out of reach; so is the brain-case out of reach."

"What would a well-aimed bullet do if it struck the brain-case?"

"Why, smash it. But you need a gun for that."

"And you can't get a gun no matter how hard you try," interposed Hackworth. "Remember I left all my guns at Kabinda? No one can import a gun into Unitaria. And none are sold here. The Unidum has completely disarmed the citizens of Unitaria."

WILLIAMS drew his brows together thoughtfully.

"Nevertheless," he said grimly, "I'm going to Boston. Somehow I'll figure out a way."

"But Lila! Dan, you haven't forgotten—"

"No, Earl. However, we can do nothing until we hear from Andrew Grant. I'll go to Boston and—"

"You'll do nothing rash?" pleaded Hackworth. "The Unidum is quick to punish, and Lila might be involved through you."

But abruptly Williams said good night and left the room.

Hackworth turned a grave face to young Spath.

"There was a close bond between Dan and his sister. Perhaps it would be wise for you, Terry, to go to Boston with him."

"Certainly," agreed the young chemist. "I can get the day off."

"I'm going to keep M'bopo here. In his present mood, Dan is liable to get violent. If M'bopo is along, one word in dialect will start him fighting, and the two of them could make plenty of trouble. Perhaps after Dan realizes his helplessness, he will gradually calm down. . . ."

In his room, Williams carefully unwrapped the layers of hide in the soft light of a shaded lamp and looked at the contents of his bundle. There was a tiger's tooth of odd shape reputed to be a potent charm, other trinkets with a history, and a soft giraffe skin pouch which he intended as a gift for Lila. He put the tiger's tooth in his pocket with a sheepish grin. Africa had left in him a vestige of native superstition.

He fingered the other articles, talking about them to M'bopo, then heaped them on the dresser-top.

Undressing, he looked through the window at suburban New York. It had started raining, a warm September rain. It blurred the scenery until he saw a sweeping jungle, a shadowed desert, gnus grazing in the brush.

He started. No, this was not Africa; it was Unitaria. It was a world with hyp-marines, Sansrun aircraft, spanned cities, a new government, and a multitude of blessings to mankind. But then there was the inhuman Eugenics Law—and the hideous Brain-control.

Even in his sleep, with M'bopo stretched out on the rug beside his bed, he clenched his fists. . . .

As the giant six-motored passenger plane hurtled high above New York on its way to Boston, Williams took a last look at the city below. Like a geometrician's paradise it spread back from the ocean, bizarrely unreal in the gloom of a cloudy day. He could faintly make out the Unidum capitol, then the city faded into murkiness. Below was farmland, ribboned with broad highways along which tiny dots moved incessantly.

Williams was in a blank mood. The revelations of the evening before had seemed grotesque after a night's sleep. Brains in machines! How impossible. Brains, officially dead, with an after-life! Running machinery. Thinking, sending out nervous impulses—*feeling!*

Sarto! Could such a thing be? Was Terry wrong? Could the consciousness that had once been Helen Williams be captured in a glass globe and forced to do endless relay-manipulations? Could the brain of that sweet young girl of long ago be in a state where the poignant memories of a happy life tortured it while some diabolical influence kept its nerve centers throbbing messages along silver wires?

Williams turned to Terry who was beside him. He must clear his mind of whirling conjecture.

"While we have the chance, Terry," he said, "suppose you tell me something more about this age in which we live. I know only too little of it as yet. Tell me about motive power, what fuels and energies you use, anything else of interest."

TERRY willingly launched into the subject, glad that Williams no longer was brooding.

"In the year when you left America on your African exploration," he said, "coal and natural oil furnished the bulk of power in Europe and America. Today, forty years later, half of Unitaria's power output is from a dream of your own time come true—tide-machines. After World War II is had been thought that at once atomic energy would be converted to commercial use, but that is still a hope and a dream. The sea-coast cities, and those a few hundred miles inland, are supplied with cheap electrical power. Up and down every important coast are large tide-stations, which convert the tide movements into hundreds of thousands of kilowatts of energy. From these it is wired via beryllium cables to the various cities. Much of this power is then transmitted for use through ether broadcast.

"In New York the electro-cars are run without overhead trolleys or third rails. They get their power from the ether. I won't attempt to describe—I couldn't—the complex system of automatic units which attach beams of radio energy between the central power station and the great numbers of electro-cars. Inland cities as far west as Pittsburgh are supplied with ether energy from the Long Island tide-stations.

"No more coal then, no miner's strikes?" asked Williams.

"No strikes," Terry grinned. "But there's coal. The other half of Unitaria's power still comes from natural deposits of coal and oil. But oil is petering out and supplies but a small part. Today coal is *never* burned as such. The gases and tars are extracted for the chemical industries, just as they were forty years ago, and only the coke is used for power. Yet neither is the coke burned! By what is called 'hydrogenation' it is converted into oils and gasolines, which burn much more efficiently than the coke.

"This liquid fuel runs railroad trains, aircraft, automobiles, and ocean craft. All Diesel engines burn coke-oil. In cities so far inland that it is impossible to make use of tide-power, internal combustion engines make electricity which is used directly, without ether broadcast. In central Europe, in what used to be Germany, rocket-turbines are being used with fair success. Places that produce water power are still in operation, as Niagara, and a certain amount of wind power is also produced.

"With the advent of cheap oil from coal, aircraft immediately began replacing surface transportation methods, and that replacing process is still going on. Perhaps in another forty years, everything will go through the air. Hypmarines which carry half the ocean commerce are really aircraft more than anything else."

"And so I take it," Williams commented soberly, "that just as men in Nineteen-thirty-three dreamed of tide-engines and rocket motive power and stratosphere flights—now an accomplished fact—so do inventors today dream and labor toward atomic power and sun power engines, earth-heat motors, and even gravity-nullifying apparatus. Probably, the *next* forty years will see those things too!"

CHAPTER VIII

Disaster

BOSTON, revealed dimly in fog wisps, appeared to be a smaller edition of New York City. Spider spans and threads knitted its business section so heavily that Williams abstractedly wondered if all the buildings would rise if a Cyclops were to pick up one with a suitably large tweezers. Like an artificial whole, a hyp-marine was coming over the horizon, skimming the water.

Their ship began to descend, then it bored to a position over the tall buildings and swooped gently. It landed like an angry dragon on the immense flat roof of the main air terminal.

"Do you know which Brain-control we want to see?" asked Williams as he and Terry walked away from the ship along the pedestrian path.

"There is only one in Boston," said Terry, "as in all large cities except New York and London, which have two each. As yet the use of Brain-controls is little better than experimental."

"An experiment that should never have been tried," muttered Williams.

Escalators took them to one of the hanging platform stations of the public transportation systems. Looking at the electro-car that slid to a noiseless stop, Williams found it hard to believe that it derived its power from an ether beam.

Ten minutes of blurring speed brought them to Branch G of Boston food products, similar to Branch E in New York, except that the all-important Brain-control was on the ground floor.

Williams approached the Brain-control room with a thumping heart. His sister's! How gruesome a thought!

Williams came to it. A look of dull amazement was on their faces; no one could see the Brain-control without feeling stunned by the wonder of it.

As they entered Williams slowly, fearfully turned his eyes to the luminescent globe suspended from the ceiling.

"Je Bru il Bra!" Sweat broke on his forehead and he pulled his gaze away, unable to look at the globe that held his sister's brain.

As he dropped his eyes, he saw a man standing before the black box at the base of the cylindrical mirror support. Dark-haired and burly, in conventional clothing with a light blue cape over his shoulders, he was busy at the black box.

"A Scientist!" whispered Terry. "Changing the nutritive supply."

Here was the first of that group of 1973 "Scientists" that Williams had seen. On the back of the man's cape was a design of a robot and girl, with a background of intricate machinery under the sun and blue sky. The fellow, in the prime of life, worked with sure fingers, his back turned to block a view of the box, the heavy steel door of which was open. But they saw him move a tall glass jar filled with a thick, colorless fluid and replace it with a similar jar after he connected the new jar with the pumping system.

Williams' eyes fastened to the globe. There was his sister's brain! That man, that Scientist, was putting in the mechanical heart a jar of liquid food that would give semi-life to—to Helen! So that she could continue to be a slave to the machines, could send continual nerve-impulses along cold silver wires. And all the while her consciousness, or whatever was imprisoned in glass, was recalling a life of far happier memories!

"Helen—Helen!" he called in his heart.

Perhaps she saw him standing there, might even now be pleading to him to release her from such horrible bondage.

She *was!* He could feel it—waves of subtle influence that shook his brain as an ultra-sound organ note shakes the ground.

Terry kept an anxious eye on Williams. He had seen the strong play of emotion in his face, in his fiery eyes, in the way he leaned against the rail. But what happened next, Terry was powerless to prevent.

With a hoarse shout, Williams vaulted over the rail, landed six feet below, catlike. Terry shouted, but it was too late. Mouthing shrill, primitive Bantu maledictions, Williams streaked toward the black box, powerful hands outstretched.

THE Scientist whirled, and instantly banged shut the black box. But one ponderous swing from the arm of a brawny, snarling man lunging at him in berserk madness bowled him violently against the relays, unconscious.

Terry leaped to the floor, darted to Williams and attempted to bring him to reason. Williams brushed him away with a steel-spring arm and continued battering at the locked door of the black box. Only one thought burned in his brain—to smash the mechanical heart inside. But even his great muscles could not affect inch-thick metal.

Terry staggered erect, looked at the panting, cursing man who was tearing at the heavy pump-tubes above the box.

"We've got to get out of here!" Terry shouted, but knew Williams did not hear.

A red light was flashing intermittently. The alarm signal!

"The guards—they will be here any moment!"

Williams must have realized its significance, for he suddenly ceased his futile battering and looked around desperately. His eye caught sight of a small wrench the Scientist had used to fit the couplings on the necks of the jars.

With a savage cry of triumph, Williams picked it up and hurled it at the brain-globe. It glanced off the glass without breaking it!

In the midst of a shattering sound of fragile mirrors and photo-electric tubes, came the shouts of men crowding the platform. Men in uniforms of blue and red and shiny leather swarmed toward them—Unidum police.

Terry fought side by side with Williams, with bare fists. Why, he did not know, except that some breath of battle had flowed from the angry man at his side to activate him. Williams was a human cyclone, powered by Herculean muscles which plunged pistonlike at sweating, grunting guards who could lay no hand on him.

In sudden exaltation, Terry threw his full strength into the battle. It was a sensation new to him, pounding at faces. It was exhilarating. He forgot everything except that he and Williams were beset by enemies who must be knocked off their feet. The savage pleasure of it dimmed his reason. Neither he nor Williams saw the man stealthily creeping back of them, with a pistol-like object in his hand.

It was suddenly over. The two embattled men stagged and crumpled to the floor, paralyzed by an agonizing shock of vivid lightning. . . .

That evening, in the prison section of the Boston Science Court, they were waiting for the trial which would be given them immediately.

"I'm sorry, and in a way not sorry," said Williams through swollen lips. "I'm sorry I got *you* into a mess, Terry. But I'm *not* sorry that I tried my level best to smash that globe."

"I understand," Terry said. "I would have been driven to knock over Professor Jorgen, the Scientist who wants to marry Lila, had I ever met him."

"Justice moves swiftly in nineteen-seventy-three," said Williams.

"Yes, especially when the charge is treason against the Unidum!"

"Treason?" repeated Williams.

Terry nodded glumly. "The Brain-control is Unidum property. They will charge us with being connected with some secret organization plotting against the Unidum. The jury will be composed of Scientists. Their verdict will be unalterable and the sentence"—Terry shuddered—"more than we deserve."

"Would it help to tell the truth? About Helen?"

"I'm sure it wouldn't," Terry said. "Williams, I'm willing to plead guilty to treasonable action against the Unidum. This will cut short the trial and prevent the implication of Hackworth—and perhaps Lila."

"I will, also," said Williams. "Only I wish you had never come with me."

WILLIAMS cursed himself. Why had he ever done such a thing so futile and thoughtless there in the Brain-control room? He had lost his head completely. He had metamorphosed into a savage jungle creature. *Sarto!* He had actually imagined that his sister's brain had entreated him to give her soul freedom! It had swept all sane thought from his mind. And now here they were, faced with stern sentence by inexorable law.

Immersed in gloom and feeling the throbs of bruises and wrenched muscles, they spoke little.

The trial was short that evening. It took place in a huge courtroom filled with curious crowds. The judge, emotionless and stern, peered at the defendants as though they were irresponsible children. Every man of the jury wore the blue cape with the symbolic insignia of Science. The very atmosphere of the place was cold, implacable, pitiless. Facing the jury of Scientists, Terry and Williams pleaded guilty to treasonable action against the Unidum. This prevented the Scientists from putting in any further charge of conspiracy.

The sentence—what would that be? Williams looked at the austere frown on the judge's brow and knew it could not be light. Terry's face was bloodless and drawn.

Then came the sentence. The words struck Williams like powerful blows.

"—just punishment will be painless death by gas, with the unmerited honor of having their cerebral organs installed in Brain-controls in the—"

There was deathly silence. Terry, beside Williams, had turned to stone.

Death? Could that be their *sentence?*

Everyone in the courtroom, even the Scientists, shuddered at the sudden harsh laugh that came from the older of the two men. Then he was led away. But at the door he jerked to a stop and faced the quiet courtroom. His voice rang out:

"Some day the Unidum will be sorry it ever permitted the inhuman Brain-control to become lawful!"

There were murmurs from the crowd and the Scientists looked at one another uneasily. The judge reddened in anger and waved for the prisoners to be taken out.

Escorted by a dozen Unidum guards, they were taken to a different cell. The door clanged shut, the key grated and there was silence. On Williams' face was a queer look of defiance, but his eyes were dazed; the dread sentence had struck hard. Suddenly he burst out fiercely:

"*My* brain in a Brain-control! What diabolical irony! If I had only succeeded in releasing Helen, then it would be easier to take. Terry, for ages the memory of having failed in that will run through my dead-alive brain!" He went on vehemently. "But they haven't executed us yet, and may the Seven Devils of the Seven Hills of Ok-Ok eat my heart out if I lose hope of escape!"

Terry thought the man had gone mad, for he began to prowl about the dark cell as though looking for a secret doorway. He stopped at the real door and shook its heavy bars experimentally. Nothing could be solider. The cell was steel-lined. On the window were heavy steel bars like those on the door.

Through it could be seen the fairy-like picture of Boston at night, but it was impossible to see the street level sixty stories down. The dark bulk of a huge enclosed span jutted from the building, extending across the street canyon. It carried electro-car service to the Unidum sub-headquarters.

Terry sat down with a feeling of pity for the older man. Apparently the strain had unsettled his mind. Perhaps he thought he was back in Africa, imprisoned in some rickety thatch hut he could batter down if he wished. Certainly from his twitching lips came a muttered stream of clipped African gibberish.

That there was no escape, Terry knew. There were hundreds of Unidum police throughout the building. The door's lock could not be picked for it had no key-hole on the inside. The walls were proof against human strength. And the one and only window let out upon a sheer drop of a thousand feet.

When the crouching Williams sneaked to the window and cocked one ear as though hearing something besides the drone of aircraft above, Terry thought it time to do something. Gently, but firmly, he tugged him away from the window, and pushed him to the wall bunk. Williams struggled, then fell back flat. He slept.

Terry threw himself on his own bunk. The utter hopelessness and despair of their situation crushed him mercilessly. They were in the steel claws of the Unidum whose justice was alloyed only with mercilessness.

CHAPTER IX

M'bopo's Plan

FOR hours after Terry and Williams had left for Boston Hackworth spent his time writing of his trip to interior Congo, a comprehensive report which he planned sending to the Federated States of Africa. M'bopo displayed a degree of intelligence in aiding him that surprised Hackworth as the Bantu traced unerringly the ramifications of the route along unexplored rivers and through unnamed deserts.

When Terry and Williams failed to appear for dinner he began to worry. Yet what could have happened, with Terry along? Probably taking in a few of the sights around Boston.

At seven o'clock Hackworth tuned in the radio-news, still uneasy. His worst suspicions were confirmed as the announcer told of the hectic fight in the Brain-control room and that Williams and Spath, finally subdued and jailed, were to be sentenced by the Science Court.

Hackworth cursed his cousin, cursed Terry, and reviled the Unidum. When M'bopo stuck his head in the doorway, and he poured out the trouble to him in a mixture of Bantu and English, M'bopo stood as though frozen.

"Let us go," said M'bopo. "I will fight. *Sarto Bru!* I will kill all the guards and take *Orno Akku* from prison."

"No, no!" said Hackworth. "This is not Africa, M'bopo. There are hundreds of guards. They will kill *you.*"

"I do not care," said the black man impassively. "Take me to *Orno Akku.*"

Hackworth suddenly realized that M'bopo was not asking, but demanding. There had come a strange gleam in the Bantu's eyes. Even the super-civilization of Unitaria could not daunt him.

"All right, M'bopo. But not tonight. They would not let us in. Tomorrow morning we will go."

M'bopo grunted and sat down crosslegged on the floor.

The next morning Hackworth and the black man were in the foyer of the Unidum sub-headquarters in Boston. At nine o'clock they were led to the sixtieth story.

The two prisoners were dejectedly standing at the window. They turned in surprise when the door swung open.

"Hackworth!" cried Terry. "I suppose this was on the radio?"

"Last night," answered Hackworth. "Dan—"

"I know," interrupted Williams. "How could I be such a fool? I can hardly explain it myself. As I stood there looking at the globe and realized that Helen's—brain was in it, something snapped."

Hackworth nodded. "You're hardly to be blamed."

"And now," said Williams bitterly, "our brains to be used in Brain-controls!"

Hackworth had not heard that. He gasped, and his eyes reflected a great horror. He knew, only too well, that the execution would take place in three days. All sentences for treasonable crimes were consummated or started in three days. The Unidum allowed no unnecessary delay to hinder the progress of its iron justice.

"Lila! Lila!" moaned Hackworth. "What will happen to her? With Terry gone she will never wake up again!"

"Yes she will," assured Williams. "Eventually the drug will lose its effect. But she will awaken only to find Terry gone and a Scientist husband awaiting her."

The three men looked at one another. Everything had now gone awry, for there would be no purpose in freeing

Lila from the Eugenics Law with Terry dead.

"We *must* try to do something!" said Hackworth suddenly, pacing up and down. "Jail-breaking is impossible—"

Hackworth's voice sank to a whisper. "Perhaps I can bribe the man with the keys. Or I might approach higher authority and let the sunlight flash on gold. I've got less than three days. . . . I'll do what I can."

Terry and Williams smiled wanly. By now even Williams had seen clearly how impossible it was to flee their prison.

But his tones were not confident, and Terry gave no sign of interest. They knew the Unidum. They knew how little hope there was for a man condemned by the Science Court. And from their very attitudes, Williams knew, too.

M'BOPO suddenly confronted Williams.

"Orno Akku wishes to go free?" he asked in Bantu. "M'bopo will fight for you. We will kill the guards and fly away in a metal bird."

"No, M'bopo," said Williams. "There are too many guards, they have guns, and a clever alarm system."

"Then I will stay here with you," said the black man promptly.

It took Williams minutes to convince M'bopo that his loyalty was misplaced, but there were tears in his eyes for the black man's unselfish devotion.

Then the guard at the door announced that their time was up and Hackworth and M'bopo were forced to leave.

The public landing field and hangar where Hackworth had left his Sansrun was on top of a building a block away. As they entered the plane and it took altitude, they passed several rows of windows heavily barred in the Unidum building.

"Orno Akku is in one of them," said Hackworth, indicating the windows.

M'bopo suddenly recognized William's face peering out of one of them. He pointed it out excitedly and Hackworth swung as close as the lane signals would allow to wave good-by.

He felt a clutch on his arm. Words poured into his ear—Bantu words, startling words. Hackworth listened, asked a few questions. The replies brought a thoughtful gleam to his eyes.

He guided his Sansrun along turns that circled the Unidum sub-headquarters and climbed across the barred windows which framed Williams' tanned face. Then Hackworth, absorbed in the consideration of certain configurations, sent the ship away from Boston. All the way back to New York, he and M'bopo talked excitedly. Could it be done? It was worth a trial. . . .

That night, lying on his bunk in a darkness broken only by the dim light that came through the window, Williams found it hard to sleep. Terry's regular breathing came to him except when the drone of an airplane filled the little cell. Poor young Terry! All that day he had been despondent. He had talked only of Lila, though clearly he had resigned himself to fate.

Williams asked himself, tossing fitfully, whether there was any hope. No. Hackworth could do nothing, even with his entire wealth. Andrew Grant could do nothing. And there was no one else to help. They were doomed. First the death, then a rude awakening of some mystic sort with the gradual realization of being a part of a complicated apparatus forced to send nerve-impulses along thin silver wires! Already Williams seemed to hear the clicking of magnet relays. He had to keep repeating to himself that he was not a Brain-control yet. But the clicking! It was still there! And a sibilant sound—like rubbing!

He jerked up his head. The sound came from the window. There was something there! He leaped from the bunk toward the window—and stumbled over a rope! A small stone at one end of it was clicking as the rope was dragged slowly across the floor by its other end.

Williams did not stop to ponder, but quickly tied the rope to a bar, giving it a jerk to indicate its being done. After scraping sounds outside, M'bopo appeared, panting. One of his hands gripped a bar; then the other. M'bopo's wiry arm muscles pulled his body upward till his knees rested on the window ledge.

"M'bopo! What is this?"

"Orno Akku!" gasped the black man. "I come to rescue you. The way I come, that way you go."

"How did you come?"

"I climb down long box that crosses ditch. I balance rope. I walk to end of rope. I jump. Here I am."

In a flash Williams understood, though M'bopo's Bantu could barely cover the subject. "Long box" was the nearby electro-car enclosed span. "Rope" was cable support.

"But these bars, M'bopo!" Williams said excitedly.

THE black man probed in his pockets and brought out a small bottle which he handed through the bars.

"You hurry, *Orno Akku*. Hackwort', he waits."

And Williams did hurry, but not with nervous rapidity. He had suddenly become calm, efficient with a cold haste. A hand on Terry's shoulder, a few whispered words, and the young chemist became imbued with the same swift efficiency. Their lives depended on how quickly they worked.

Williams crouched near the door, his ear against it. Terry opened the bottle, poured some of its contents at the base of one of the window bars. There was a prolonged hiss. Then the bar was loose, completely eaten through. Another drawn-out hiss and again a bar was loose. Five bars were treated. Terry thanked the gods that an acid existed which attacked steel as viciously and quickly as sodium metal attacks water.

Williams knew there had never been a compound like that in 1933. When the final bar had been eaten away by the acid, he leaped to the window, grasped the first bar and pulled. Terry held the black man by the belt as the steel gave and curled upward. With a frantic strength, they bent the other four.

"Now," said Williams, panting, "comes the hardest part. That cable support that leads to the span is about ten feet below, says M'bopo. We must climb down the rope to the cable, then walk along it to the span. And"—he looked steadily at Terry—"it's a thousand feet straight down."

"Let's go," Terry said steadily.

Williams motioned for him to go first and Terry lost no time in clambering through the window. His first glance at the view from his precarious perch on the sill brought a chill to his heart. Far below, only partially revealed by lights, was the ground level. At various heights were both enclosed and platform spans, hung with red lights. All about were the cadaverous heights of slim towers. It was a dizzying spectacle. Terry recovered his shaken nerves, twisted carefully about, and lowered himself, glad to feel the firm rope in his hands. He descended hand over hand until his feet struck something solid, and a strong hand steadied him. M'bopo's round eyes peered into his.

In another moment, Williams came down the rope and all three of them stood crowded on the flat cable-lug joined to the building. A cool autumn breeze whistled around the wall and quickly took the perspiration off their brows.

"All right," whispered Williams. "I listened at the door just before I left through the window. Apparently none of the guards have heard a sound. But the longer we hesitate, the more chance we take. M'bopo, *umo ulka dis*. He'll go first, Terry. Then you. Do you think you can manage without help?"

Terry watched the black man, without answering. The cable support for the nearby span stretched taut, enclosing a triangle with the building and the span housing. It was a hundred feet long and M'bopo, arms outstretched and slightly crouched to balance the gentle breeze, negotiated the cable without pause, as sure-footed as a mountain goat. His body gradually faded into the gloom at the side of the span.

"I could hold your hand," suggested Williams, "or your belt."

Suddenly realizing that he must seem craven in the older man's eyes, for not having answered his question, Terry looked into his eyes.

"I go alone, Williams. If I fall, there is no need for you to fall *with* me."

Williams gripped his hand encouragingly. It was one thing for M'bopo and himself, long trained in Africa in physical pursuits, to traverse the cable, but quite another for a man reared in civilization. Such a man does not have the fine balance and muscular coordination of a child of nature, nor does he have that callousness toward danger that brings out great courage.

Nevertheless, Terry stepped away from the cable-lug with set jaw, determined to do or die. He took the first ten steps confidently and began to feel that his first fears were silly. But at the next step, a gust of wind pushed at him. Off-balance, he blindly put his free foot forward and only by sheerest luck touched the cable with his toe. Back of him a voice called encouragement. It was no time to hesitate and recover breath or nerve, so Terry plunged recklessly forward, barely able to see the cable at his feet.

HE steeled himself not to look past the support, knowing that one glance at the pit under him would paralyze every muscle in his body. Breathing hard, swaying, and moving steadily forward, Terry forgot everything but the cable, his feet, and the wind. It seemed hours on end that he alternately lifted his feet and set them down. He dared not look up nor to the side.

He wondered how far he was. Was this an eternal nightmare? Already he had tramped miles. His leg muscles ached as though he had run a marathon. He was getting dizzy. The constant stare of concentration at the cable was bringing spots to his eyes. He was swaying! The wind, in spiteful little gusts, would—

Terry felt his front foot barely scrape the cable. It slipped and he knew it was over. Suddenly limp and hopeless, he felt himself toppling—toppling into that deep pit between buildings. His body would drop like a stone, past five spans, down to the hard street. Nothing would stop it!

Now what had happened, wondered Terry. Something had grabbed his belt. Something strained at his body that was hanging over the pit with one foot only on the cable. And that something pulled him back from the abyss.

Terry's brain cleared. M'bopo was there with a hand in his belt, looking at him in mute inquiry. Terry waved forward, again on balance. One—two—three steps, and then Terry felt the welcome solidity of a broad, flat surface. They were on the span's roof! He had lost his balance and almost fallen only three steps from safety! M'bopo had saved his life.

M'bopo was grinning, and large beads of sweat stood out on his brow. Only he would ever realize how much superhuman, agonizing strength it had taken to pull the falling white man upright, and at the constant risk of losing his own balance should the torque shift too suddenly from limp body to straining muscles.

There was a sound of running feet, then a familiar voice as a figure loomed up from farther along the roof of the span.

"Terry, my boy! Thank God you made it!"

"Mr. Hackworth! But how did you—"

"Explanations later. Must get away as quickly as possible."

They turned to watch the dim figure coming along the cable. Without hesitation, firmly and swiftly, Williams moved along. There was an indefinable grace about him and a boyish elasticity that made it hard for Terry to realize how old a man he was in point of years. Certainly no younger man could have performed the feat any easier.

Williams came up with a rush, waving a jubilant arm.

"All here safe and sound!" he exclaimed, nodding to Hackworth. "No delay now. Into the ship, all of us!"

As they ran toward the dark hull of Hackworth's Sansrun, they heard the rumble of an electro-car beneath them. Terry smiled, wondering what the passengers would think or say if they knew that on the roof under which they streaked were four jail-breakers and an outlaw ship. How simple—and wonderful—it had been, after all, when but an hour before escape had seemed absolutely impossible!

Williams closed the cabin door behind them. Hackworth was already at the controls. But before starting the motors, he had them all look around for a possible lurking police ship. It was against the law to land on a span. Detection would bring immediate pursuit.

High above from the towers of the tallest buildings came the broad sweeps of aircraft beacons, ribboning the sky. Several of the important traffic lanes were bathed in constant light, revealing considerable night traffic. Where they were, beneath the lowest lane, it was a pocket of darkness between the lighted streets and the swinging searchlights.

Satisfied that no police ships were around, Hackworth brought the twin motors to life, idled them for a minute, then shot the ship upward. They climbed obliquely toward the neon-lighted spire of a lane mark, up and up out of the canyon of spans. Suddenly there were lane signals and Hackworth obediently leveled. He breathed a sigh of relief.

"The police danger is over. Now we're just one ship out of thousands."

He spoke too confidently, however. The pilot of a lumbering freighter, passing the Unidum sub-headquarters to a landing a mile away, had seen the shadowed ship rise from the canyon. Suspicious as to the motives of a private ship coming from that forbidden direction, he reported the incident to the police after landing.

CHAPTER X

The Tide-Station

IN the meantime, Hackworth piloted his ship away from Boston and headed in the gloom of the night to the south. He built up a fast but safe speed, high above the commercial lanes. Then he turned to his cousin.

"Dan, you're a free man, at least for a while."

"Thanks to you, Earl."

"Thanks to M'bopo," corrected Hackworth. "It was his idea. At first I thought it hare-brained. Then I saw how easy it would be to land the Sansrun on the span roof in the night. M'bopo claimed the rest would be just as easy."

Williams struck his head deprecatingly. "And to think it escaped me entirely! M'bopo, unlettered native as we call him, has scored against the all-powerful Unidum. It's a curious thought. Well"—he changed his tone—"the important thing is where do we go now?"

"You and Terry at present are outlaws," Hackworth said. "There will be a price on your heads. A peaceful life in Unitaria is impossible. You've got to get away to some place not governed by the Unidum."

"Never!" said Terry vehemently.

"Let me finish, Terry," said Hackworth quietly. "My plan is to negotiate your escape from Unitaria, with Lila! And after I've had my money transferred to foreign accounts, I'll join you. We can all live happily in some sheltered corner of earth, free of the Unidum."

Hackworth's eyes shone as he went on. "Right now I am taking you to the Long Island Tide-station. The superintendent is a close friend of mine. I've already spoken to him. A tide-station is the ideal place for you two to hide because the police will never think of you being there. You lie low and I will charter a stratosphere ship and somehow get Lila from the hospital. Andrew Grant will help me. Then—"

An exclamation from Terry cut him off.

"Look! A ship is after us!"

They peered through the rear-vision mirror. With ominous purposefulness, a long, slim tri-motored plane hung on their trail, rapidly gaining. It could not be mere chance that it was following them, for both ships were out of the regular lanes.

"A Unidum police ship!" Hackworth cried weakly. "I can tell by its shape!"

Terry confirmed what Hackworth had said.

"That stops us," Hackworth said wearily. "It's possible they merely wonder why we fly so high and fast, but if they make us land and question us, we're done for."

But Williams was not so willing to admit defeat.

"How long before we reach the tide-station?"

"About twenty minutes at top speed. But there's no use trying to outfly them, Dan. Besides, they're armed. They'll disable us. In a few minutes there will be more police ships here—"

"And there's the Stop-and-Land signal!" burst in Terry.

From the pursuing ship had flashed a thin beam of crimson light, flooding the cabin.

"Stop-and-land, never!" cried Williams, grasping Hackworth by the arm. "It's dark! Turn off the cabin lights and drop. Maneuver around, throw 'em off the track! Why should we give up so tamely after we've broken out of jail?"

Terry firmly motioned Hackworth away from the controls.

"*I'll* give them a run-around!"

Plunged in darkness, Terry shot the ship down. Leveling gradually, he swung in a huge arc that would take them away from the police ship. From that plane now shot brilliant beams of white light which probed through the darkness, searching for the vanishing prey.

Then Terry cursed. To one side appeared more beams of dancing light. Some of the rays almost touched them and only a quick drop prevented it.

"They've got the whole Boston Patrol after us!" gasped Hackworth. "They must know we broke jail. They'll hem us in—"

"Not if I can help it," muttered Terry.

WILLIAMS encouraged him and their ship became a plunging, weaving thing, trying to escape the inexorable beams from dozens of police ships. It looked like a dance of the fireflies. Every so often, the fleeing ship would flicker in the chance beam of a light and the police ships would converge like hungry vultures.

"If I only had more speed!" groaned Terry. "I can't draw away. I can only dodge!"

"No good, Terry," Williams said quietly. "They're gradually cutting us off on all sides. Can you give them a run as far as the tide-station without getting in range of their weapons?"

"Possibly, if we rise at full power. As a helicopter, we're their equal because they only have two adaptable engines. We *might* get as far as the tide-station. But a lot of good that will do."

"Try it!" said Williams.

Terry jammed his foot on the throttle and swung the air-screws upward. The beams of the police ships fell below, then again followed as flicker after flicker

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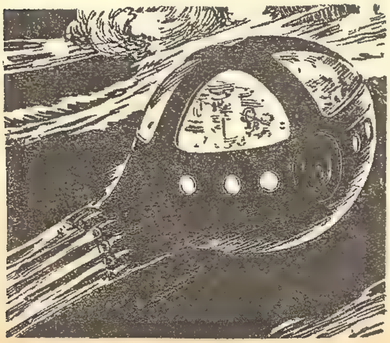

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revealed the outlaw ship rising. But before they gained sufficient altitude to head off the fleeing ship, Terry had swung level at full speed. He flew over a police ship from which came a sudden scarlet flash.

"Missed!" breathed Terry. "They won't get another chance for some time."

Ten minutes of shattering flight, with the police gaining rapidly, brought them within sight of the tide-station at the tip of Long Island. It was an incredible affair, alien to eyes of 1933. Long concrete appendages reached out to sea for miles, dimly visible in reflected light. They radiated from a comparatively small building, flat and unadorned. In the exact center of its circular flat roof was a small brightly lit bubble, the control room. All the enormous electrical energy produced by the tides at that point was wired to cities as far north as Boston, and to New York.

Williams also knew one important thing about the tide-station which offered a slim hope of their again escaping the Unidum. At his order, Terry shot the plane downward, and landed on the flat roof.

"No time to talk," said Williams hurriedly. "Earl, lead the way to your friend, the superintendent."

Even as the four of them raced across the roof toward a lighted alcove from which steps led downward, one of the police ships descended with roaring motors. At the foot of the stairs Joe Manners, the superintendent, met them.

"Hackworth!" he cried. "You've ruined me! I saw—the police—"

"We've ruined nothing yet!" cried Williams. "Listen to me. . . ."

In terse sentences, he unfolded his plan. Manners nodded and led their way along a corridor and then up steps. They emerged in a small room with a hemispherical ceiling. In it was only a desk, a chair, and a panel of dials and switches. But it was the master control-room of the station. From below came the hum of the giant tide-generators.

Manners closed the door and locked it. He glanced at the dial readings, turned.

"The plan will work only if we properly strike fear into their hearts."

"But will there be any trouble for you afterward?" asked Hackworth.

"I think not. Little is known of the technicalities of a tide-station to the average person, even the police. I will be able to lie out of it. Anyhow, I have good reasons for wishing to help you in this predicament. You see—"

A loud knocking at the door cut him off. He signaled caution.

"Open for the Unidum police!" came in loud tones.

"I—I can't!" shouted back Manners with well-simulated fear in his voice. "I am in the hands of desperate men who—" He choked as though he had received dire threats.

From the other side of the door came a jumbled murmur. Then again a voice:

"Two of those men are criminals, sentenced to death for treason. They broke prison in Boston!"

"Oh, oh, oh!" moaned Manners. "What shall I do?"

"Shut up!" shouted Williams with well-timed ferocity.

"Hey, you!" came from the minions of the law. "Surrender, or it will go hard with you."

"Never, curse you!" shouted back Williams. "Rather than go back to certain death, we will wreck this tide-station and die in its ruins!"

MANNERS pulled a little switch which sent a crackling spark across two fuse electrodes, then shouted in alarm, stamping his feet on the floor.

"Don't touch that switch!" he cried desperately.

The police, hearing the noises of a scuffle which sounded ominous, threw their weight against the door in an attempt to batter it down. But the door held.

"You'll blow up—"

"Get out of my way!"

"Help!"

"No help for you! Nor for the police! Nor for anybody!"

The words, the hoarse shouts, the

scuffling noises, struck fear into the hearts of the police. The desperadoes in the control room were tampering with electrical dynamite, thousands of Kilowatts of it!

Then came Manners' voice again in a piercing scream.

"The master switch! He pulled it! Let me out of here! The whole station will blow up! Fools, you've got just ten seconds to live!"

The police stamped away from the door. If the station was doomed to crash, no need for them to lose their lives with the insane criminals who had unleashed the Titanic power.

When the noise of their running feet died away, the men in the little control room grinned at one another.

"It worked." Manners chuckled. Then he became serious. "Now's your chance! Fly away in the dark. I'll turn out every light in the station, but hurry because they'll throw searchlights down here when they get high enough. You can take-off in the confusion and slip away. When they come to investigate, I'll tell them I saved the station just in time and that you criminals escaped—how or where, I won't know."

As they left the room there came the roar of the police ships taking off.

"No worry about them!" cried Williams. "They're intent on saving their own precious necks."

Just as they reached the roof, every light went out. Manners had timed it exactly right. Under cover of darkness, they ran to their ship.

Hackworth, in the lead, jumped in. He waited impatiently for the others, but to his surprise, he heard Williams' voice.

"Start the motors, Earl, and get away from here as fast as you can. Head for home—and safety."

"What?" spluttered Hackworth. "And you—and Terry?"

"We'll take care of ourselves. No one knows you're connected with this. We've got to escape Unitaria, and we can do that without you."

"But, Dan—"

"Go, for Lila's sake! Hurry, Hackworth! Any moment the police will put a searchlight down here!"

Hackworth shouted a good-by and took the ship up and away. To him it seemed a madman's move, but to have argued with his strong-minded cousin would have been futile. Hardly had he drawn safely away than hovering police ships, suspicious because the threatened catastrophe had not occurred, cast their lights downward. They revealed a deserted landing roof. The beams began to swing about frantically, but Hackworth was already beyond their effective range.

By the time the police had swung searchlights on the roof-top, Williams, Terry, and M'bopo were again in the control room, facing a startled Manners.

"The devil take you!" he cried. "You will get me in trouble now if the police find me with you."

"I've changed my plans," said Williams calmly. "Staying with Hackworth would have been dangerous, not only for us, but for him."

"You don't think about me!" cried Manners shrilly. "I helped you at great personal risk, and now you want me to hide you!"

"We're not going to stay, Manners," cut in Williams sharply. "Listen to me. I've heard that Iceland is an independent island where fugitives from the Unidum can safely hide. If we can get to Iceland from here—"

"You can't get transportation from this tide-station," cried Manners. "The nearest dock is at Long Island City."

"But you have planes here?"

WHATEVER Williams had in mind was never uttered, for the sudden harsh drone of laboring engines informed them that the police had returned.

Manners stared at them in speechless misery.

"Come on, Terry!" called Williams, racing to the door. "It was a mistake, not going with Hackworth. But we can still give the police a run-around."

It was senseless to think of going to the landing roof. Already they could hear the footsteps of approaching Unidum guards. Williams dashed down a corridor that led oceanward, Terry and M'bopo at his heels. There were shouts behind them. The corridor opened into a long and curving chamber from the opposite wall off which led straight passageways.

"This way!" said Terry suddenly, running down the hall. "There's a possible chance—"

At one of the long passageways whose end seemed lost in distance, he stopped and pointed at what seemed to be a miniature train.

"The tide-station's transportation system, propelled like an electro-car to the long tide-power piers, sometimes five miles long. I can run it!"

"Where does it lead to?"

"Well—nowhere. Out into the ocean." Terry shrugged. There was no escape—only delay.

"Come on," said Williams in sudden decision. "We'll take a ride in it. Perhaps somewhere along that five-mile stretch we can hide.

Anything they did now was aimless. There could be but one ending—eventual capture. They were merely fleeing because it was against their nature to surrender meekly.

CHAPTER XI

A Chance Friend

ONCE they were all seated in the vehicle, Terry pulled the starting lever savagely. With but a faint hum of magnetic motors, it started, gathering speed swiftly, almost noiselessly on its rubber-covered wheels. But the enormously long cavern became resonant with the echoes.

The train ran on a ledge. Not twenty feet below was the ocean, swelling toward high tide. At high tide tremendous shutters would clip across the tide-pier dozens of feet down. The receding ocean level would then leave a great mass of water captured in reservoirs, and possessing terrific potential energy. How the weight of falling water was converted into kinetic energy, Williams could not see, nor did he care. All that interested him was how to get out of this predicament. Would a chance somehow present itself?

When the vehicle came to a stop before the end of the tide-pier, which was set with windows, they looked at one another in dismay. Behind them was the sound of another train.

"The police," said Terry emotionlessly, "are right on our heels. I suppose Manners had to give us away." He became suddenly vehement. "We're trapped, Williams! We've got a choice of capture and the Brain-control death, or—"

He pointed to the still, black water. It would be a quick and merciless death. He shuddered. Their brains! They would fish out the bodies and take out the brains—

"There is no escape. Williams, we—"

Terry felt a hand shaking his shoulder. An imperative voice was asking something.

"Terry! What are those lights out there beyond the tide-pier?"

"Lights?" Terry looked. "Moored seaplanes—private craft mainly."

"Can you swim that far?'

"Ill try it," answered Terry.

They stripped to the skin and threw their clothes over the railing into the water. M'bopo went first through an opened window. Terry poised a moment before diving, shivering. Williams looked down the passageway, grimly. The police were still too far away to have seen what their quarry was doing. He closed the window hanging by the still, then he dropped.

He came up gasping in the cold water. Calling softly to his companions, he struck out for the brightest of the lights which danced on the choppy water out in the gloom.

"Take it easy," he warned. "It looks like a long swim."

Terry changed to a smooth side-stroke. Williams uttered a few dialect phrases to M'bopo. The black man obediently crawled to the side of the young chemist and let him set the pace. That this would be a test of stamina, Williams knew. And that Terry would be the first to weaken, he knew also. As for himself and M'bopo, their tireless bodies, jungle trained, would stand terrific punishment.

They fought the ocean with its shoreward tow and chilling bite. Choppy waves seemed spitefully intent on choking them and pushing them under. It was an ordeal to test any strong man. And the bobbing lights ahead seemed to dance ever farther away.

It might have been an hour later—or a year, for all they knew—when Terry spluttered violently and stopped.

"I can't go on!" he gasped between clenched teeth and blue lips. "Maybe you can—make it—"

Williams and M'bopo swam to either side of him.

"Here, Terry—one hand on each of our shoulders. Look, we're almost there!"

Terry had not the strength to raise his head and look. He held on to their shoulders grimly, incredulous that they still had the spirit to go on when he was completely fagged. Under his aching fingers he could feel the rippling of powerful shoulder muscles. Could they go on much longer?

Ages later Terry felt a change in the motion of the swimmers. A voice that seemed miles away spoke.

"*Sarto!*" gasped Williams. "We've reached something."

Terry shook off his numbed lethargy and raised eyes that smarted from salt water.

"The sea-plane dock," he mumbled. "Climb up—rest."

Even as he said it, he wondered how it would be accomplished, for the floating dock's level was three feet above. He heard splashing and saw M'bojo leaping out of the water with frightful contortions in the attempt to catch the dock edge. He made it. With a spasmodic jerk that must have taken superhuman effort, he pulled himself up and rolled over onto the dock.

WITH the help of M'bopo reaching down, the other two men rolled onto the wooden surface. For minutes only stertorous breathing and spasmodic shivers occupied them as they lay flat, regaining their sadly taxed energy.

The dock was in reality a giant raft, anchored securely. Cut into its edges were spaces long and broad enough to admit the pontoons of seacraft. It was a public service for owners of seaplanes who wished to moor them temporarily. Each plane twinkled with red lights at the wing tips.

Williams was the first to stagger erect. He pulled Terry to his feet and made him jump around violently to restore circulation. M'bopo joined them. The exercise helped greatly to revive them, even though the cool night breeze now threatened to freeze them.

"Let's go," said Williams, controlling chattering teeth with effort. "Must get a ship—fight for it. M'bopo—" He finished with dialect that brought a gleam to the black man's eyes.

In the deep gloom that lay over the floating dock, they made their way toward a tri-motored craft. Terry licked stiffened lips and worked tightened jaws.

"Williams, listen to me," he finally said. "They're moored with two ropes from pontoon-stays to dock-posts. Must loosen them."

Williams nodded. "But first we storm the cabin."

He cursed when they reached the first plane. Its cabin was dark and the doors locked. They went to the next and it, too, was empty and locked. At the third there was a light inside and the sound of many voices.

M'bopo looked inquiringly at Williams, who shook his head. A dozen or so men were more than they could handle.

The fourth was a small ship, twin-motored.

"Here we go," said Williams. "I'd rather fight than freeze."

He jerked open the cabin door and plunged in. Terry, crowding in after M'bopo, expected to hear shouts and cries, but all he heard was a muffled gasp and a crack of fist on flesh. Then he saw Williams grinning at him.

"Only one man," he said. "And I took care of him."

The cabin, comfortably heated, was bliss after what they had undergone. They relaxed in wordless ecstasy. Crumpled on the floor was a man on whose unconscious face was stunned surprise.

The warmth gradually soaked into their blue skins and loosened their tongues.

"You can fly this?" Williams asked Terry.

"I think so. Controls look similar to landcraft."

"We must go as soon as possible. Unitaria is no place for us right now. I know"—Williams saw the frown on Terry's face—"that you are thinking of Lila, but we would be courting capture here. We can hide safely in Iceland, then do our best to get Lila there. That was why I wanted Hackworth to get away, so—"

He stopped short at a sudden sound of laboring plane motors—a ship landing. Terry, peering out on the dock, turned with dismay in his face.

"A police ship!"

Williams saw a striped ship bouncing to a stop near a housing whose windows were lighted. Five uniformed men leaped from the plane and banged on the door of the housing. The lone attendant of the seaplane mooring came out and they engaged in gesticulating conversation.

"Then the police are not so simple," muttered Williams. "They've come here on the chance we made this swim."

"The Unidum guards are noted for their efficiency," said Terry.

Williams saw the police head rapidly for the first of the moored craft, followed by the attendant. They disappeared in the shadows but emerged a moment later to walk toward the next plane.

"They're looking in each ship!" breathed Terry. "We've got to hide!"

"No use," said Williams quickly. "No place, anyway. Terry, start the motors and get ready for instant take-off. M'bopo and I will loose the moor-ropes."

"But they'll hear! With their lightning pistols, you two don't stand a chance—"

"Got to fight for it, Terry. You start the motors and leave the rest to us. If you hear me shout, give her the gun." He shot clipped Bantu phrases to the black man.

TERRY opened his mouth to remonstrate, but they were gone. He thought of leaping out to help them, but decided to follow Williams' instructions. Williams seemed to have a peculiar knack for thinking of workable plans on the spur of the moment.

Terry grasped the starter switch and closed it. The twin motors hurled their powerful voice across the water.

Williams and M'bopo already had unhooked the mooring ropes from the pontoons. At a low-voiced command, the black man raced around the back of the ship to Williams and they crouched in the deep shadow of the wing nearest the police. They waited, eyes on the uniformed guards, like panthers at a zebra watering spa. Williams was transported back twenty years to a time when he and a brawny black had ambushed a party of marauders under the shadow of a huge tree and routed them.

At the unexpected roar of the motors, the police whirled in surprise, lightning-pistols in hand. They sprang forward, intent on capturing the outlaws before the motors were sufficiently warmed to start. As they raced past a wing to reach the cabin door two naked figures, one white and one black, leaped among them, hard fists flying.

The onslaught laid two of the guards out flat and senseless. The other three flung about with pistols upraised, to meet a storm of blows. One pistol flashed harmlessly into the night air, and its user crashed against the wing. His last impression was the shuddery one of a demoniacal black face leering at him. The remaining two guards, knocked off their feet, bounced up again. But the weapons had flown out of their hands.

Williams and M'bopo began to take

jolting punishment. Out of the corner of his eye, Williams saw the attendant stoop for one of the dropped lightning-pistols.

It was time for super-action. With a savage grunt, Williams lowered his head, and unmindful of a stunning punch from his antagonist, grasped him about the thighs and heaved mightily. He flung the helpless guard toward the attendant just as the man fired. The policeman sagged, paralyzed, and before the pistol spoke again, Williams had bowled over the attendant with a terrific blow to the chest.

He whirled to see M'bopo arising from where he had just squeezed the breath out of an adversary with scissored legs and strong fingers. *"Ulak g'nol!?"* He grinned. "Any more?"

Terry, sitting at the controls in apprehension, unable to hear a sound above the engine noise, heaved a sigh of relief as his somewhat battered companions appeared at the cabin door.

"Let's go," shouted Williams, "before more police ships come up!"

Terry pulled the ship gently along till the edge of the dock appeared, then opened the throttle. Then they were off the water and rising rapidly. Williams looked down at the dwindling dock and the huge tide-station on whose flat roof were numerous dots—the rest of the Unidum fleet. He suddenly laughed.

"We've given them something to think about," he said. "Can you find your way to Iceland, Terry?"

"I'll have to guess at it," admitted Terry. "But we'll find it. There's plenty of fuel—enough to go to Europe. We're safe now. But I wish I could be sure Hackworth got away safely."

"Beyond a doubt," said Williams confidently, then shook his fist in the direction of New York in a sudden reversal of thought. "Brain-controls, eh? Make us victims of the most inhuman thing ever seen on the face of earth! Not while I—"

IN the corner of his eyes he had seen the original occupant of the plane stir. The fellow sat up, rubbing a tender jaw. Williams was wondering what he would say.

He seemed about middle-aged, sturdy of body, and had remarkably penetrating dark eyes. Those eyes gleamed at Williams with dazed perplexity.

"I seem to have acquired a voluntary pilot," he said in a drawling voice.

"Yes, and two voluntary passengers, heading for Iceland. We mean you no harm. At our destination, we will give you back this ship."

"You are fleeing from the law?" queried the man, raising himself to one of the side seats.

"Which is no business of yours."

"And you were sentenced to death and the Brain-control?" the man asked.

Williams started. "You heard us. . . . Well, as long as you know, what difference does it make?"

"Perhaps a lot," was the enigmatic reply. "After you get to Iceland, what then?"

"Don't tell him," warned Terry.

Williams scowled. "Whoever you are, you've got too much unhealthy curiosity. Just sit down and keep still."

He turned away and looked to the east. The first flush of dawn had changed the ocean to a sea of blood. The indistinct silhouette of an ocean liner was seemingly mired in the vast bosom of the sea.

Williams suddenly whirled. "Hold on there! What are you up to?"

The man, having arisen and taken a step toward the rear, halted and turned with surprise.

"Why, you need clothes, don't you?"

"We do," retorted Williams. "But—"

"Watch him!" came from Terry. "He might have a gun in the supply room!"

CHAPTER XII

Through the Stratosphere

EVEN as Terry spoke Williams advanced on the original occupant of the seaplane threateningly.

"Just a minute," said the man. "We've got some things to talk over, I think. I've been trying to think just what to do, but now I've decided. I may be taking a chance with you three, but briefly, would you join an organization that will allow you to strike back at the Unidum?"

Williams stared, speechless. "What organization, and just who are you?"

"John Agarth is my name," said the man, coming closer to Terry so he could hear. "About a year ago, a group of men met in a small city of Europe and pledged themselves to a certain cause. To end the menace of the Brain-control!"

"Go on," said Williams breathlessly. "You can trust us."

"I do trust you," said Agarth. "I sense in you three a daring spirit we want in our members. To go on, the Brain-control, aside from its hideousness, is a distinct menace to humanity. It must be wiped out. Our organization, although large already, can still use men of spirit and daring. What is your answer?"

"Count me in," said Williams quickly, "and that includes my man here, M'bopo. Terry?"

"As an outlaw in the eyes of the Unidum," Terry said thoughtfully, "it would be unreasonable to refuse. But I reserve the right to pursue my own affairs if occasion arises."

"Reasonable enough," Agarth assured. "Now here's what I have to offer in return for your cooperation—immunity from the law in secret hiding places, and the opportunity of working out your own salvation. If our plans go through, the Unidum decree, which now demands your life, will be null and void. Then there will be the spice of adventure—"

"Which is most acceptable," said Williams.

"And for assurance that I am not deceiving you," continued Agarth, "look at this."

He pulled a folded paper from inside his coat. It was a Unidum criminal notice that John Agarth, as described, was an outlaw at large.

"You see," he explained at their surprise, "I once was sentenced to die, as you were, and to have the 'honor' of submitting my brain to a Brain-control. In the early days of our organization we were over-zealous, and made an abortive attempt to smash Brain-controls. Several of our members"—his voice was bitter—"were executed. The rest of us were rescued in a bloody jailbreak. From then on we planned more secretly and cunningly. We call ourselves the Brothers of Humanity. I will explain more in detail later. I think now you men had better sleep. I'll take the controls."

As he replaced Terry in the pilot seat, he rubbed his sore jaw ruefully.

"Williams, you gave me the surprise of my life at the floating dock. I was waiting for a secret word-of-mouth message from New York. I didn't expect a naked man to jump at me and knock me out."

"You understand—"

"Perfectly," assured Agarth. "The message will get to me eventually. Now instead of Iceland, we're going to our headquarters in Paris. It is secret, and safe."

Terry was already fast asleep on the floor. Before Williams succumbed he found a moment to revel in the thought of a pleasing future. What kind fate had saved him from the Unidum and brought him within reach of the opportunity to strike back? What to do about Lila? Unanswerable questions they were, that put him to sleep. Beside him lay M'bopo, more worn and battered than any of them, content that *Orne Akku* was still alive and free. . . .

IN Paris, three days later, John Agarth came upon Williams and Terry talking together in a room of the secret headquarters of the Brothers of Humanity in Paris. "I have both good and bad news for you," Agarth said.

"From Hackworth?" queried Terry eagerly.

Agarth handed him a sheet of paper. "I got in touch with him through our secret communication channels. I've had the message decoded for you."

The gist of it was that Hackworth had made a clean escape from the police at the tide-station, that Lila was still peacefully sleeping to the exasperation of her doctors, and that Andrew Grant had admitted his absolute inability to get Lila's release from the Eugenics Law. Hackworth wanted to know what Williams and Terry planned to do next.

"I don't think there's any doubt about what we plan to do," said Williams. "We'll work toward the goal of the Brothers of Humanity. As long as Lila is safe, Terry, you can feel free to help. Let's see now . . . Lila has been in a coma for ten days. The Unidum's best medical men are puzzled and have failed to awaken her. The drug is beyond their knowledge."

"And only I," whispered Terry, "can awaken her!" He looked up at Agarth with shining eyes. "I pledge myself as a member of the Brothers of Humanity."

"Good," said Agarth. "And instead of merely becoming members without authority, each of you will be what we call 'marshal.' As you now know, the Brothers of Humanity has an orderly, semi-military foundation. At the head are the two generals; next in authority are five majors, of which I am one; then come the marshals, at present ten in number; then come captains, lieutenants, and finally the brothers."

"But why should Terry and myself be honored?" asked Williams perplexed. "We haven't done a thing. We've just been a lot of worry and expense to you, Agarth."

"But you *have* done something," contradicted Agarth, smiling. He turned serious suddenly. "You have been instrumental, whether wittingly or not, in gaining two important members for our organization. Andrew Grant and Joe Manners!"

"They are now Brothers?"

"Yes. For some time our agents, who are constantly trying to enlist influential men, had been surreptitiously approaching both those men. Not till yesterday did either of them yield—Grant because Terry's poignant plight had touched his heart, Manners because he suddenly saw how cruel the Unidum was in sentencing you two to death and worse. Grant and Manners are important additions to our Brotherhood, especially the man who controls the life-current that pours into New York."

"Manners is in no trouble because of us, is he?" asked Williams.

"No. There was suspicion and pressure against him at first, but the Unidum finally took his word that he'd had nothing to do with the escape of three 'vicious criminals.'"

Agarth left and Williams turned to Terry. "I can't begin to tell you how glad I am that events led to this, Terry. From the moment I heard that my sister's—brain—was in a Brain-control, I felt I could never know a moment of peace till I had done what I could to end her purgatory. And those hundreds of other brains! It's ghastly! Some kind fate has made it possible for me to help end the enslavement of the brains! To that I dedicate my every effort, and if need be, my life!"

"And I, too," said Terry. "I find it hard to understand now how I even resigned myself so abjectly to such things. For years the Brain-control where I worked had bothered me. Then when Lila was torn away from me by the Eugenics Law, I seemed to break like a dried reed. Only when you unfolded a plan to save Lila did I awaken from that mental lethargy. Now I see how mouse-couraged I was. And I'm determined to do my part to end wrong!"

THREE days before, Agarth had landed the plane on the shores of southern France—a state of Unitaria roughly corresponding to the France of pre-Unidum times—and they had been driven to Paris by agents of the Brotherhood, speeding along super-highways at two hundred miles an hour.

The new Paris with its spanned towers and spires and comfortable residences had shifted a few miles northward, leaving the old city deserted and falling to ruin. Now this old section, in one of the camouflaged underground strongholds of World War I. in use when a Hitlerized Germany occupied Paris, the Brotherhood had set up a headquarters, unmolested and unsuspected by the Unidum. The underground chambers were roomy and well-ventilated, an ideal habitation for men requiring utter secrecy.

Agarth and his agents had been gradually spreading the invisible web of the Brotherhood all over European Unitaria, working with four other centralized units in the continent. The superior headquarters of the Brotherhood, where the two generals of the organization guided the movement, was on the western coast of America near San Francisco.

The Brotherhood's main strength was concentrated west of the Rockies, where people had always been bitterly opposed to the usurpation of rights the Unidum had taken over.

The primary purpose of the organization of the Brothers of Humanity, as Agarth had said, was to end the enslavement of the brains. After their first sporadic attempt to smash all Brain-controls, which had ended so disastrously, Agarth and the others who had escaped had conceived a far cleverer plan. To achieve it they needed a large membership of staunch adherents. Then, on a certain date, at a certain hour, members of the Brotherhood were to enter every one of the two thousand Brain-control chambers in Unitaria, and simultaneously ruin them by opening the nutrition boxes and injecting a virulent poison into the fluid pumped to the brains.

This, in itself, was merely a gesture, announcing that the Brotherhood had declared its existence to the Unidum. Then, with every Brain-control inert and useless, the Brotherhood was to arise and defy the Unidum ever to try again to set up Brain-controls. The Brotherhood was confident public opinion would sway their way. So the Unidum, suddenly confronted with such purposeful antagonism, and rather than precipitate a bloody revolution, would be forced to accede to the demands of the Brotherhood.

When Agarth joined Williams and Terry at dinner that evening, the conversation was about that great day when the Brotherhood would drop its mask of secrecy and face the Unidum.

"Just how," asked Williams, "will the poisoning of the brains be done?"

"Well, that was one of our greatest problems," said Agarth. "It has to be done without a hitch. Only by demonstrating to all Unitaria that the Brotherhood is powerful can we hope to win. The news, 'ALL BRAIN-CONTROLS RENDERED USELESS; ORGANIZED GROUP DEFIES UNIDUM TO RENEW THEM,' will cause the majority of citizens to flock to our banner. But if we render useless only half or less of the Brain-controls, the Unidum will laugh at us and destroy us, knowing the masses will have no confidence in us. That first move of ours must be complete and efficient.

"Sadly enough, this can only be accomplished at the sacrifice of many lives. Every man who goes to poison a brain on that great day will go a willing martyr! The only practicable way to destroy the brain in a Brain-control is by poisoning. And to do that the nutrition box must be opened. And opening that rings an alarm. So the poisoner will be captured. The Unidum will execute him summarily."

"Is there no way to open the nutrition boxes without ringing the alarm?"

Agarth shook his head. "The metal of the boxes is an alloy impervious to chemicals, to heat-torches, and to mechanical violence. The only way to get at the pump inside is via the lock and door. Since the lock is too intricate to pick, it must be forced. Each of our men on that day will have a small tool with spreading prongs which will be given a terrific leverage by means of a draw-screw. This, inserted in the keyhole that conducts electricity immediately rings the alarm. However, each man will have time enough to inject the poison before the guards come, but not time enough to escape! All those lives to be lost. But no other way of killing the brain is quick and sure enough to accomplish our purpose."

WILLIAMS and Terry had an identical thought.

"The acid, Terry!" cried Williams. "That eats steel!"

Terry nodded. "The lock mechanism must be of ferrous metal because the impervium alloy can't be machined that finely. The acid will eat it away in a wink!"

"Yes," agreed Agarth. "But acid carries electricity. The alarm will ring just as certainly as in the other case."

Terry leaped to his feet. "Not this acid! It doesn't carry current! It is a compound of helium and chlorine, as non-conductive as oil! At the merest contact with ferrous metals, it throws nascent chlorine loose, and frees helium."

"Strange," said Agarth. "I've never heard of that compound."

"It's a recent discovery," Terry said quickly, "not yet widely known or marketed. Only by great fortune did I have a bottle of it in my laboratory, which Hackworth knew about, and without which we should never have escaped prison."

Agarth sprang to his feet in excitement. "If it carries no current, then it is a godsend! It may mean the saving of many lives. Terry, we must get some of the acid and test it. . . ."

Arising from the water, a long, thin sliver of metal with wide, thin wings left France and soared gracefully into the rosy sky of dawn. Its motors sang a song of power. It ascended the crimson vault of heaven and when the air grew thin and cold, flaming gases belched from its rear, pushing it forward and upward mightily. In a grand arc, it puffed its way to the height of twenty miles, then leveled out, its speed so great that the dawn never broke into broad day to the occupants.

Inside the ship, Williams clutched the arm-rests of his seat, amazed at the powerful surges that pressed his body back against the leather. Agarth smiled a little, and Terry, at the other side, stared out the window, hardly less affected than Williams, although he had ridden in a stratosphere ship before. In a seat immediately back of them sat M'bopo, who while not terrified, was merely incoherent.

"Sarto je Bru!" muttered Williams. "I feel like I'm going to Mars at a million miles an hour."

Agarth chuckled. "Everybody's first trip in a stratosphere rocket ship is terrifying."

They were bound for San Francisco and the main headquarters of the Brotherhood in one of the organization's rocket ships—the fastest mode of transportation known. Agarth had left the Paris headquarters in the hands of others. All the higher officers of the Brotherhood were now converging on San Francisco, to await the Great Day, only three days off. In Europe, hundreds of grim Brothers of Humanity awaited the zero hour when they would saunter into the Brain-control chambers as casual visitors and at a certain hour do the deed that was to end the Enslavement of the Brains.

In an hour, the rocket ship had reached its high cruising level. Artificial air pumped through the air-tight cabin. Heating units hissed softly and kept out the cold. The pilots, after reaching a velocity of a thousand miles an hour, throttled the rockets to where they kept the speed constant.

Then it was easier for the passengers. Constricted chests were able to breathe naturally again.

"We will be there in seven hours," said Agarth. "Eight thousand miles in eight hours, counting the hour to ascend."

"And I thought the hyp-marine was fast!" commented Williams.

CHAPTER XIII

Daring

THE panorama was awesome in its grandeur. The flush of permanent dawn suffused the scene with undulating billows of clouds. At times, a wide rift in the cloud-bank would unveil the shimmering green of endless ocean. Williams felt that he was looking at earth from another planet. Around them the stars shone as brightly as light globes. And even when dawn slowly pushed the rim of the sun above water, the stars continued to shine defiantly.

"Some rocket ships have ascended as high as two hundred miles," said Agarth. "At that height, one is in space and the corona and halo of the sun fail to dim the stars."

"Have any rocket ships gone to the moon?" asked Williams.

"They have gone, but never returned. One unfortunate space pioneer fell into the moon's gravitational field to become its satellite. Astronomers can see his tiny ship swinging eternally in a narrow orbit—a wandering coffin."

At the mid-point of the ocean, Williams espied, through broken clouds, a sizable object apparently floating on the surface.

"*Sarto,* what is that?" he asked. "To be visible from this height, it must be a monstrous thing."

"That is a most cherished experiment of the Unidum Scientists," Terry observed. "There is a great deal of secrecy about it. It is supposed to be a plant to produce energy from sunlight, as sunlight already has been used for heating homes. The set-up of mirrors is on a raft a quarter-mile square! The mirrors collect the sun's rays not only from above, but from below—those reflected by the vast body of the ocean when the face of a wave turns right. At any one moment, countless square miles of wave faces reflect light to that setup. It collects them, and also the direct rays, and converts them into energy. It is still experimental, but the Unidum has high hopes of it. It has cost them years of labor and scientific effort. There are always dozens of Scientists aboard and skilled tradesmen."

"If the Unidum would only concentrate itself more on things like that," interjected Agarth, "instead of on an inhuman scientific mistake like the Brain-control, it would be all right. That sun-power affair, if it becomes practicable, can do only good."

"Unless they think of installing a few Brain-controls there too," said Williams.

High over the American continent flashed the rocket ship, once passing another and larger stratosphere plane. Williams could see by the way the towns and cities rolled down the horizon that they had a terrific speed. When the Rocky Mountains came in sight, the rocket blasts died out and the ship began to settle.

Agarth showed Williams how to turn his seat around to face the rear. He saw a good reason for that when the ship fell into heavier air and began to decelerate mightily.

Williams felt that a gigantic hand was pushing him up into the sky. For a half-hour they passed through swirling clouds. Then suddenly it was clear and Williams saw the ocean rise to meet them. A slight bump and swishing slide through water. Then silence.

"Here we are," said Agarth, springing up. "The Pacific in the first hour of dawn. We left at dawn and arrive at the same time!" He chuckled and opened the door, revealing a wooden dock. "We are a hundred miles from San Francisco. A brother is waiting to drive us to the Brotherhood's headquarters. There you will meet the two generals whose sagacity and zeal have made possible our crusade. . . ."

IN the wilds of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, the Brothers of Humanity had set up their main headquarters in a hidden cave. There were no highways near, and from above, it was invisible. Supplies were brought in, and agents arrived and left in secrecy. Had the Unidum so much as suspected that such a nest of conspiracy existed, they would have borne down on it in full strength. That there had never been betrayal showed how cautiously the Brotherhood worked, and how staunch were the trusted members.

As Agarth led them through passageways now and then a man passed, saluting Agarth. In several lighted rock rooms in the series of caves Williams could see men laboring with papers and codes and radio instruments. This was the core of the network of the Brotherhood.

Finally Agarth reached a room where a door had been built in. He knocked.

"Come in," said a man who opened the door. "The generals are expecting you."

At the far end of the large room several men sat at crude tables, writing. Against the wall was a desk at which sat two men who arose to meet them.

"Major Agarth, welcome!"

Agarth saluted, then turned to introduce Terry and Williams to Generals Hagen and Bromberg. Terry's eyes widened at the names.

"Hah!" said Bromberg. "You recognize us?"

"Y-yes," stammered Terry. "Professor Bromberg and Doctor Hagen were the two Scientists who wrote the monograph on the After-Life of Brains in the Brain-controls, and who were impeached and disappeared!"

"Exactly," agreed Bromberg. "Sit down, all of you." He went on: "Yes, we are those two Scientists. When we made our investigations and published the results we believed that would cause the abolition of Brain-controls. Instead, we were arrested, dragged into court like common criminals! We were exiled to Asia because Scientists cannot be executed by law. We labored there for the Federation of Asia as honored savants, but the disgrace of our banishment rankled, and we became more determined to end the enslavement of the brains. We heard of the attempt of Major Agarth and his men to smash Brain-controls, and got in touch with him after their sensational jail-break.

"The Brotherhood was organized. And three days from now, if fate wills, we will end the tyranny of Brain-Enslavement!"

Both Bromberg and Hagen were well past middle age. Bromberg was a man of grave demeanor, quiet and meek. Hagen was a fiery soul, excitable and talkative. His dark eyes gleamed with an almost fanatical light.

"Marshals Williams and Spath," Bromberg said, "we welcome you into our organization. Major Agarth has sent me relevant details about you in code. Doomed by the Unidum to be the victims of *more* insidious Brain-controls, you are doubly welcome. From the formula you sent for the new acid, we have already manufactured and sent bottles of it to all our agents in Unitaria. We will strike our first blow against the Unidum without their knowing it until it is too late even to apprehend the men who will poison the brains. The first they will know is that the machines in the food plants are acting strangely. They will investigate, perhaps not until hours after the poisoning. Ha! They will see the lock corroded —then they will know!"

Bromberg's eyes glistened. Then he turned to exchange a few words with Hagen.

"General Hagen wishes to confer with Major Agarth," he said. "If you, Marshals Williams and Spath, and your black man care to have lunch with me—"

They followed Bromberg to a nearby dining cave. Bromberg ran an approving eye over Williams.

"You are a brawny man, Marshal Williams. Agarth tells me you have been in Africa the past forty years. And your escape from the Boston prison and the run-around you gave the police, ha! Remarkable. Are you a man of luck, or great enterprise?"

"A man of quick wit and sudden plans," said Terry sincerely.

WILLIAMS flushed under his African tan.

"I think luck plays a great part in my life, General. Otherwise I should have been dead in Africa years ago."

Bromberg nodded. "I only hope you have brought some of your luck with you into the Brotherhood. Perhaps we'll need it . . . Let me tell you some things about the Unidum. I was in the Medical

Bureau for years and learned a lot. The Unidum of today is heading towards tyranny and decay and the first signs of it are the Eugenics Law and the Brain-control innovation. When the Unidum come into being it was the greatest advancement civilization has ever known. Its members were the souls of integrity, the most intelligent, noblest of the entire federation. They founded a totally new type of government and gave it a hearty start.

"Then came the Eugenics Law, a wonderful idea but applied heartlessly and wrongly. Scientific eugenics may some day remodel the world, and people will be born more nearly equal, but a Eugenics Law which begins with tyranny only undermines the morality of all concerned. Loveless marriages are a return to feudal aristocracy with all its evils. Until ten years ago the Unidum worked like a clock. But after the passage of the Eugenics Law, there arose dissension. Many of the Scientists, Hagen and myself included, were opposed to the Law, but the other faction prevented us from doing anything. Then five years later, the second great blow fell—the enslavement of the brains!

"What the masses do not realize, what even many of the Scientists do not realize, is what will eventually lead to—a cold, inhuman, scientific social system in which Scientists, rapidly increasing through the application of the Eugenics Law, will completely dominate a dwindling citizenship whose brains will go after death to run the machinery of the world! In a few centuries this will be a world of men who will call themselves Scientists but who will be slothful mental monsters, living like decadent gods in a completely mechanized world, falling to certain decay!"

The others listened spell-bound as the earnest professor continued.

"And the whole diabolical scheme originated in the mind of but *one* man—the present Executive Molier of the Unidum. He perfected the brain-rejuvenation process. He must have conceived his plans long before he became Executive. His is one of those minds that, goaded by ruthlessness and power-lust, can form the future of civilization. His co-executive, Ashley, is a puppet, powerless against Molier's superior will. Molier dominates Unitaria today. And by his persuasive powers, his subtle propaganda, he has begun the corruption of the once noble Unidum. If not checked, he will lead them to absolute tyranny and eventual decay."

Bromberg paused, then spoke with less passion.

"I see that these are unexpected revelations to you. Well, few outside of the Brotherhood have even the vaguest suspicion that a black cloud has darkened the future. You wonder too, how it is possible for one man to carry forward such fiendish plans. You must understand that the Unidum, in order to forge ahead rapidly with its Utopian principles, invested absolute authority in the central government. It controlled all industry. It limited private wealth. It supervised transportation and communication. And it gave to the two Executives dictatorial powers!

"With the People's Parliament dominated by Molier, it has been easy for him to get the Eugenics Law and Brain-control Act through. Yet so cleverly has he acted that he has made people believe that the Eugenics Law is commendable—more Scientists, more advancement. As for the Brain-controls—less work for the people.

"But the Unidum has not yet been corrupted. Once Molier's power is broken, all will be well."

"But after all," said Williams, "Molier is only a man. He must die some day. After his death won't his schemes puff away like a breath of foul air?"

"You don't know Molier," assured Bromberg. "His evil genius foresees that his perverted ideals must live after him or his work is for nothing. He has poured poisoned words into the ears of many Unidum Scientists, painted a lurid picture of a future in which the unintellectual masses will not be around to hinder the advance of Science. It's easy to sway a Scientist with talk of scientific Utopias. His staunch adherents form a sort of unorganized, yet powerfully growing group. Through Andrew Grant we have obtained their names. We even know who Molier has picked to succeed him. Professor Jorgen, a man no less cunning and ruthless than Molier, who—"

HE caught the look of astonishment in the eyes of the new members as they heard the name Professor Jorgen, the Scientist to whom Lila was to be married! Terry quickly explained.

"Heaven forbid that she should marry such a fiend!" exclaimed Bromberg. "He, as well as Molier, must be stripped of all authority and power if Unitaria is not to become a vast experimental laboratory for mad Scientists. But only three days from now the Brothers of Humanity will bring them to an accounting. . . ."

The next day, after sober reflection on the matter, Dan Williams had a serious request to make, and put it up to Agarth.

"It is a decision I cannot make," said Agarth. "I'll have to refer it to one of the generals. Come on—we'll go see them."

They traversed underground corridors to the central office. Bromberg looked up from his papers with a tired smile.

"Sorry to disturb you at such a time," said Agarth, "but I must ask for your decision. Marshal Williams has requested to be delegated to the poisoning of the Boston Brain-control!"

Bromberg looked at Williams in surprise. "You wish to risk your life—"

"I do," said Williams, with determination. "In the Boston Brain-control is my sister's brain. Trying to smash the globe led to my sentence for treason—and Terry's. I've sworn to release my sister from that mental torture which you and Doctor Hagen have proved exists. I have done nothing noteworthy for the Brotherhood yet. In being one of the poisoners, I will have done my part."

"Marshal Williams," said Bromberg slowly, "I will not attempt to dissuade you, for I can understand your feelings. Let me shake your hand. You are a brave man."

Terry and Williams saw then how human the professor was. Before he had been merely an impersonal leader. Now his eye was moist with feeling.

"And I'd like to accompany Williams!" said Terry.

"Terry, no!" Williams was shaking his head.

"General Bromberg," said Terry. "Your answer?"

"Go, and God be with you! Such spirit as yours will save us from tyranny. Major Agarth, attend to the details."

They left General Bromberg then, and after an hour of instruction Agarth left them after a hearty hand-clasp. Terry, Williams, and M'bopo were escorted from the headquarters into a cold, clear night. A silent guide took them to an auto.

Reaching the coast an hour later, they were hurried to a waiting plane, a speedy Sansrun. In it they were to be taken to a small California city, to embark for Boston in a public airliner. Each of the agents sent out that night to poison the brains went from a different city. In Europe, the same careful system was employed.

Early the next day, two thousand members of the Brotherhood would simultaneously look at clocks, open the black metal nutrition boxes after destroying the locks, and pour a small vial of deadly poison into the jar from which liquid food was pumped to the brain in the globe.

CHAPTER XIV

Death to the Brains

SOME hours later Dan Williams and Terry Spath stepped from an electro-car in Boston.

"We are in constant danger of arrest," said Terry, "if anyone recognizes us as the men who not two weeks ago tried to smash the Brain-control." His eyes searched for the blue and red of Unidum police.

"I suppose so," said Williams, "but perhaps our very daring is our protection."

Passing a loitering policeman on the way to the food products building, Terry held his breath. Cold eyes fastened on them for a moment, then flicked aimlessly away. They were unrecognized! After all why should the Unidum guards be thinking only of those two bold, bad men who had thrown a wrench in a Brain-control? Terry began to realize that it was only natural no police should stop them with an eye of suspicion. And as for entering food products, were there not visitors daily doing the same thing?

Yet the nearer they approached, the more nervous Terry became. He felt for the tiny flat aspirator in his inside coat pocket. Williams had in his pocket a vial of a virulent poison.

Early morning—it was only nine o'clock—had been picked for zero hour, since few sightseers were abroad at that time. The Brain-control room was empty when they entered it.

"Five minutes," whispered Terry. That closely had everything been planned.

Williams drew a long breath as he again gazed upon the globe which held his sister's brain. He felt a fierce exultation, but no hallucination that his sister was talking to him. He was sane and cool now. He had an important commission and it must be done carefully and quietly—no blundering or losing his head.

Williams spoke to M'bopo in dialect, then to Terry.

"M'bopo will watch at the far door. You stand at the near one. If all is clear, I'll go ahead. If not, we'll take the chance that all the other brothers are taking all over Unitaria and go through with it. Give me the acid."

Williams sprang lightly to the pit level. Calmly he inserted the aspirator nozzle in the keyhole of the black box and pressed the bulb. There was a sharp hiss. He glanced at the alarm bulb above; it was dark. He tried the handle. It stuck!

More acid with the nozzle twisting in his fingers. Louder hissing but still the handle would not turn! Keeping his eye on the alarm bulb, he sprayed again and again, till a strong smell of chlorinic substances pervaded the room. *Sarto!* What spiteful thing kept that half-destroyed lock from yielding? Beads of sweat were on his forehead. He wondered if the other brothers were having the same trouble.

A fierce whisper from Terry startled him. "Something coming! *Hurry!*"

Williams squirted the acid until it was gone, and desperately threw his weight on the handle. With a loud click it suddenly yielded. Swinging the door open, Williams stretched his hands toward the foremost of two jars, quickly unscrewed a threaded cap at the top.

"Good-by, Helen!" he murmured as he dropped the gelatin vial into the jar. "It is for the best!" The action of water on the gelatin would release the poison.

Williams swung the door shut and turned, ready for anything.

"Up here quickly!" hissed Terry. "They don't know—"

Two elderly women who had entered, loudly telling each other all about the Brain-control, were too busy to notice two flushed, excited men. Waving to M'bopo to join them in the corridor, Williams and Terry left.

It had worked perfectly. It might be hours before the erratic behavior of the machines below would be detected. They left the building as calmly as they could and in a few minutes stepped from the escalator onto an electro-car platform.

Williams felt as though a great load had been lifted from his shoulders.

"It is done! It is done!"

Those words revolving in his mind brought him a deep peace.

Then Terry had grasped his arm and was pulling him toward one side of the platform.

"Didn't you hear me, man? I said I'm

going to call up Hackworth, tell him we've succeeded, and ask about Lila!"

TERRY stepped into a phone booth while his companions waited outside. He emerged with a happy smile on his face.

"Lila! She's still 'sleeping' soundly! Hackworth was overjoyed to hear my voice. He wanted us to come see him but I told him it would be inviting disaster."

"Right. It won't be healthy for us in Boston, or anywhere in the East in a few hours. We must get to the West Coast."

At a shout they whirled, startled. A man in blue and red uniform was tugging at his lightning pistol and running toward them. Two other guards at the far end of the platform were racing up.

"We're recognized!" gasped Terry.

Williams swept an eye over the scene. The long, narrow platform, with few people in sight, was a bad place to be confronted by police. Yet the escalator was too far away for them to make a run for it. Far down the tunnel-like span he could see an approaching electro-car—and there were only three guards!

Williams whispered rapidly. M'bopo nodded, with a fierce grin. Terry set his jaw grimly.

The guard who had first shouted hurled explanations to the two who came up. They ran to where the three men waited quietly.

"You're under arrest!" cried the one in the lead. He waved his pistol threateningly. "Better come quietly."

"Just a minute," said Williams. "What have we done?"

A small crowd quickly formed about them. The police waved them back.

"You're Dan Williams and Terry Spath, wanted for treason and jail-breaking," declared the guard, though somewhat puzzled by Williams' calm. "I recognize you all right!"

"Such insolence!" exclaimed Williams, looking insulted. "Do you hear that, Briggs?" He turned to Terry. "We are those arch-criminals who tried to wreck a Brain-control!" He faced the guard sternly. "Sir, out of three million people in Boston did you have to pick out us for your horse-play! I shall report you!"

The guard lowered the pistol in indecision. The other guards who had merely answered their companion's shouts, looked embarrassed at the crowd's laughter.

"Well, I must do my duty," said the accusing guard doggedly. "You look like those criminals. I'll have to ask you to come with me to the nearest police office for a check-up."

"Shall we allow this fellow to disgrace us?" Williams asked Terry. "Or shall we"—the electro-car was hissing to a stop—*"give them what they deserve?"*

The three of them leaped forward suddenly. Three hard fists knocked three uniformed men flat, without a chance to raise their pistols.

The crowd scattered in alarm, some toward the escalator, others stampeding into the electro-car, with Williams and his companions among them. It was an automatic transfer station, so there was no conductor to raise an alarm. The driver, seeing nothing of the fracas, sent the electro-car humming away from the platform on which lay three prone figures. One of them staggered erect, shouting futilely for the car to stop. Then he picked up the other two guards, and raced for the phone booth.

Inside the electro-car, Williams, Terry, and M'bopo grinned as they sat down near the exit. Those who had witnessed the affair looked terrorized, as though expecting them to begin a general massacre. The rest of the passengers looked avidly curious.

"Safe for the moment," breathed Williams. "But they'll be on the lookout for us. We *must* get out of Boston and the sooner, the better."

"They'll have guards at every station on this line before long," Terry said hurriedly. "If we transfer at the next automatic transfer station to a lower level line, we'll slip out of their hands, because they can't have guards at *every* station in the city."

WILLIAMS pulled something from his pocket and thrust it into Terry's hand without revealing it to nearby passengers. Terry felt the smooth outline of a lightning pistol.

"I picked up one for you and one for me," explained Williams. "How do you work them?"

"Button on the side where you hold your index finger," said Terry. "But be careful with it! The catch near the firing button has two positions—one for a paralyzing charge, the other for a killing charge. And if we ever get caught with these—"

Williams smiled. "You forget we're already criminals under a death sentence. Pistols can't make us worse felons."

Terry jumped up, releasing his seat-hands, as the electro-car came to a halt.

"Come on! We transfer here."

They leaped out the door.

Williams glanced hastily up and down the platform and breathed in relief. Not a policeman in sight. Terry led the way to an escalator. At the next lower level he turned into a banistered walk that took them to the middle of one of three platforms. An electro-car stopped before them. As they entered it a blue and red figure dashed from the escalator opposite, waving and shouting. But the electro-car whisked away.

"They're on our trail," Terry said. "To fool them we'll skip the next station and stop at a terminal. We'll pay another fare, and take an express."

There were no shouting guards at the terminal, and the three embarked safely on a sixth-level span car. It rumbled on its grooves at frightful speed.

"*Now* let them locate us with three misleading transfers between us," Terry smiled grimly.

"Now how do we get out of Boston?"

Terry was silent in thought for a moment.

"At the next transfer station, I'll take a look at the city guide. Frankly, I don't know where we are. Then we can get to an air-port and—" He frowned. "Williams, word will have been received by now at every airport to watch for us. We don't stand a chance of getting aboard without being stopped. Every train depot will have notice, so will the hyp-marine depots and docks. There's only one way left to get out of the city, unless we walk, and that's by automobile."

"Then by auto it is," said Williams.

"But there's no public service in autos. They are all owned privately. We would have to—to confiscate one."

"That shouldn't stop us," returned Williams with a shrug.

An hour later found them in the west suburbs of Boston, watching the sparse morning auto traffic and the occasional pedestrians. A cool breeze swept upon them. They shivered, for their clothing was designed for warmer temperatures.

"It's not so easy," Terry was saying pessimistically. "We can't jump into a moving car, and those parked are sure to be either locked or without the ignition key."

"Can't we hire a taxi and throw the driver out?"

"Taxi? What is that?" When Williams explained, in surprise, Terry shook his head. "We don't have such things, Williams. People either use electro-car service, or own their cars."

"*Je Bru il Bra!*" exclaimed Williams. "Well, we can't go back downtown, with a horde of vultures in blue and red scouring around for us there. And once they find out that the Brain-control is poisoned, and hear that *all* the Brain-controls in Unitaria have been tampered with, Unidum guards will be looking with suspicion at everybody."

Williams moved away.

"We've got to find an auto with keys. Perhaps if we look into all parked cars, we might find one waiting for us to jump into and go."

An hour of searching did no good. Williams began to grip the pistol in his pocket tightly and cast his eye at slow-moving autos.

HE felt his arm gripped by spasmodic fingers. It was Terry.

"Listen!"

They had reached one of the public

open-air Newsmarkets, set off from the street and large enough to seat a hundred persons. From fan-grouped loudspeakers came the stentorian voice of the announcer.

"Boston Brain-control ruined! The brain in the globe has been poisoned! Two women found there tearfully deny having anything to do with it. They claim three men, one of them a Negro, were leaving as they arrived. The three were accosted at electro-car Station Level Four Number Ten and fled after attacking three Unidum guards. The lock on the nutrition box—"

The announcer went into detail while Terry and Williams looked at one another aghast. Already a swift crowd had jammed the Newsmarket.

"Let's get out of this vicinity!" muttered Terry. "Now we *are* in for it."

As they hurried away the giant voice was saying:

"—reports from New York, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh that the Brain-controls in those cities have been poisoned! This seems to be the beginning of an anti-Unidum move—"

"Not to mention what Professor Bromberg and Doctor Hagen will be broadcasting to Unitaria soon." Williams smiled grimly. "Terry, follow me, and don't be afraid to use that pistol if you have to!"

Williams had seen an auto stop before a house a hundred feet away. Out of it stepped two men who looked in surprise at the men running at them.

"We need your car," snapped Williams.

"What is this?" spluttered a tall powerfully built man.

"Hand over the key," grated Williams. "We want your car and we'll fight for it!"

The man swung a fist that missed. Then he backed away at the sight of the pistol Terry was aiming at him.

"Your key!" said Terry.

Reluctantly it was handed over. "I'll have you jailed for this!"

"Better men than you have tried it!" sang out Williams from the auto, as it hummed away from the curb.

CHAPTER XV

The Mad Scientist

GRIMLY intent, Terry drove as swiftly as he dared, winding along the streets till he struck the highways outside the city. At noon they reached Worcester and took passage on an air-liner to San Francisco. There they contacted one of the Brotherhood's undercover agents, and were driven by auto to the general headquarters. It was close to midnight when they entered the secret underground passages.

The guide led them directly to Agarth who greeted them warmly.

"I have been wondering about you all day," he conded. "When Stevenson phoned—secret radio-phone—from San Francisco that you were on the way here, I was relieved. I feared the Unidum had you."

"It was close," said Williams, and recounted the adventures of the day. "How has it all turned out in general?"

"Splendidly!" cried Agarth, eyes aglow. "Every brain-control in Unitaria except a possible three, is useless! Reports from Europe have been coming in all day. And our American agents have come back alive and successful. There are only three Brain-controls we know nothing about, for the operatives assigned to them have not arrived or phoned. They may have failed and been captured, or killed by guards in escaping. However, we can claim success. Already public news-casts have hinted that a gigantic revolution is on. The Unidum as yet has made no official move."

Agarth turned back to his work.

The next morning Terry and Williams met Bromberg in a corridor. Preoccupied and care-worn though he looked, he stopped to greet them.

"I heard about your safe arrival from Major Agarth," he said. "We're proud of you, as we are of all our gallant operatives against Molier and his tyrannical tribe. Ha! Two thousand brains know a peace that has been denied them for five long years! If we accomplish nothing else, at least we have done that. Yet we will accomplish much more. I *know* it! Quiet citizens who have long hated the Enslavement of the Brains, but have never dared protest, are gaining courage. The Unidum will find the mob growling at any attempt to call it treason. This afternoon we will thunder it to all Unitaria!"

He left Terry and Williams with the firm conviction that unless unforeseen circumstances thwarted him, he would surely take the threat of tyranny from Unitaria.

At a conference called the next day, for the opening announcement of the Brotherhood's further plans, Williams took in the scene with interest. It was a large rock-bound chamber far below the ground level. Near one wall on a wooden dais were the two generals. Hagen was sitting quietly, in deep thought, Bromberg was pacing up and down, hands clenched behind his back. On a table near him was a microphone, its red signal dark. Grouped about the dais were all the officers of the Brotherhood then in America, grim-faced. The atmosphere was tense.

Agarth stopped beside Williams and Terry.

"We're waiting for connection to the Universal Broadcast System," he informed them. "It will carry Bromberg's speech to every corner of Unitaria."

"Isn't it dangerous doing that?" asked Williams. "Suppose the Unidum traces the wave and decides to crush the Brotherhood?"

"They can't trace the wave," informed Agarth. "We have not gone ahead blunderingly. From here Bromberg's voice will be carried by *wire* to an amateur ham's broadcasting antennae far to the east. From there it will connect to some sub-station of the Universal Broadcast system. At any moment now, one of our brothers who are radio staff men will complete the connection."

"Are these underground strongholds unknown to the people at large?"

"In the main, yes. Most of our hideouts are located in barren spots. Still the Unidum will not be able to ignore us because our very existence means revolution. And—"

AGARTH stopped as the red signal light on the microphone began flashing brightly. General Bromberg took a position before it. A small man whose dark eyes gleamed in a care-worn face, Bromberg's voice rang out in words that were to change history.

"Citizens of Unitaria! Since our ultra-nation came into existence, under the leadership of a scientific government, it has been known as the Unidum. 'Uni' from unity, and 'dum' from *duma* or power—the power of unity! United in common interests and privileges, the civilization of Europe and America has been tremendously advanced. With petty national animosity eliminated, with a standard tongue replacing the confusion of dozens of languages, with every state working toward the common good, and with a central governing power both strong and sagacious, Unitaria unquestionably is the best and greatest community of human beings of all time.

"But a crisis is upon us! Citizens must now decide between passive acceptance of governmental mistakes, or active resistance to them. Foremost among such mistakes is the Brain-control Act. I, Professor Bromberg, and my colleague, Doctor Hagen, exiled three years ago by the Unidum, declare to all the world that the Brain-control Act is more hideous and heinous than the Spanish Inquisition! Every unfortunate brain used to run machinery like a mechanized robot, although dead medically, lives an after-life of perpetual agony! Memories of life, subconscious impressions of their slavery, and a desire for release, torture those brains every minute of every day. The Unidum will deny it, but it is true!

"The Unidum will tell you that the use of dead brains will make life for the living easier and pleasanter, will increase leisure time, and make life free and happy.

"Yes, but think, citizens of Unitaria! Think of a future in which Brain-controls run all machinery. Then think of a purgatory after life in which your enslaved brain, remembering, labors hour after hour for years on end! You would then pray for death—and it would be denied you. What good to live a life of ease and plenty when the price is a horrible nightmare from which there is no release until the very nerves of your brain burn out from torment? What good to live like a god when the death that comes eventually is merely a door to a more dreadful Hades than even Dante could have described?

"Yet the Brain-control Act is an official statute. The Unidum has defended it tenaciously even though its inhumanness has been demonstrated. It was foreseen that there must be organized opposition. Doctor Hagen and I are the heads of an organization pledged to end the enslavement of the brains! We appeal to you, citizens, to help bring the Unidum to realize its terrible mistake.

"We, the Brothers of Humanity, have taken the initial step. Yesterday, as doubtless all Unitaria knows by now, our operatives poisoned every brain in every Brain-control in our land. *And brains must never be used again!* The Unidum must be made to realize, by petitions, notices, mass opinions, that no longer can we tolerate such an evil as the use of brains in machinery. It is up to you, citizens of Unitaria, to complete what we have begun. No government, however powerful, can ignore public opinion.

"I will not speak for our Brotherhood again unless conditions require it. Do not forget, however, that we are highly organized and absolutely determined to end the enslavement of the brains!"

Bromberg turned from the microphone to be greeted with lusty cheers.

"My friends," Agarth said to Williams and Terry, "that speech will go down in history. No matter how the Unidum may try to suppress it, it will live by word of mouth."

"You think it will be suppressed?" asked Williams.

"Certainly. It was only by a trick that it was broadcast today; an elaborate trick in which our operatives opened the broadcast channels for the few minutes that Bromberg talked. From now on the Unidum will guard the broadcast channels like a hawk And will see to it that no printed copies are circulated. Bromberg expects mass opinion to carry the day, but I—well, some will hesitate, some shrink at the thought of opposing government. Others will wait to see what somebody else does. I don't believe the Unidum will abolish Brain-control without—bloodshed!"

HE was right. The next day an official answer was given by the Unidum to the document demanding repeal of the Brain-control Act. The Unidum decree stated that Professor Bromberg and Doctor Hagen and their compatriots were guilty of treason and were rebels, to be hunted down as such.

On the third evening after the broadcast Agarth dropped in on Williams and Terry in their cave room. He was in a fever of excitement.

"Everything is topsy-turvy," he said, nervously lighting a cigarette. "Unitaria is in an uproar. The masses have begun to squabble, for the Unidum has been dispensing verbal poison. Our statements have been refuted, facts distorted, we've been called anarchistic rebels seeking power, and investigations that will soon be sending hundreds to death without trial for treason have been begun. Even Bromberg is beginning to admit that Molier is more corrupt and has seized more dictatorial power than any of us thought. He has placed himself on such solid ground that nothing short of assassination or revolution will shake him loose. In war the Unidum was conceived. Must it die that way too?"

Agarth sighed and stood up.

"A general meeting of all officers has been called. Come."

The great room with the dais was

even more crowded than it had been on the day of the broadcast. Practically every officer of the Brotherhood was there, many having come from Europe at the signs of brewing trouble.

Bromberg raised a hand for silence and addressed the officers.

"As you all know," he said, "the Unidum has struck back viciously. Executive Molier, the tyrant, is playing for high stakes. He has organized the Scientists whom he has baited with lust for power, and that group holds the entire Unidum in its iron grasp. With Jorgen as his first lieutenant, he is organizing a war offensive against us.

"And, Brothers of Humanity, we must defeat him! We will be fighting the dread power of the whole Unidum, but we will soon have thousands flocking to our banner. In a few days we will have a completely equipped broadcast station set up and through it the mobilization of our military forces will begin. Our first move must be to take over the whole Western coast as base territory, and we will be striking ahead of the Unidum. The Pacific hyp-marine fleet is ours now. The crews of over half the fleet are ready to renounce the Unidum. We have secret underground strongholds from Vancouver to Mexico. The Federation of Asia will supply us with armament.

"It will mean hard work, men—bitterness and bloodshed. But better that than a dark future of tyranny. We are not fighting the Unidum's principles of peace and cooperation; we are pitting ourselves against Molier! Ostensibly, we are enemies of the Unidum, but we are seeking to break Molier's power, not to disrupt Unitaria. And we will press our campaign until public opinion, with a thunderous voice, demands repeal of the Brain-control Act. Once the people see the connection between the Eugenics Law and the Brain-control Act, nothing can prevent the downfall of Molier.

"But we must work fast. That Molier realizes his predicament is evidenced by the swiftness with which the Unidum declared us rebels. Each of you officers report to Major Agarth by midnight tonight for assignment to definite work. General Hagen and myself, with the majors, go into immediate conference."

CHAPTER XVI

Aboard the Sansruns

UNEASY and worried, once Williams and Terry were back in their room, Terry wiped a perspiring brow.

"Whew! War! Revolution! And the suddenness of the whole thing! The utter secrecy with which the Brotherhood worked!"

"They had to, Terry," Williams said. "With as powerful and watchful a government as the Unidum. That's why the first blow struck has had such a staggering effect on the Unidum. What armament does the Unidum posses, Terry? Is it much different from that of Nineteen-thirty-three?"

Terry sat down and drew a chair close to Williams.

"The equipment of today," he explained, "is not much different from that used in the All-Nations War, except that they did have A-bombs and H-bombs then, which now have been outlawed, and are no longer produced. Besides, between the super-nations of today there's armed peace. Unitaria has several fleets of armed hyp-marines that take the place of the battleships and dreadnoughts. She has also a sizable fleet of bombing and fighting aircraft. Little ground artillery has been manufactured since the last war. Frankly, the Unidum is little better prepared for warfare than we are."

"But suppose," suggested Williams, "they swept their air fleets across the Rockies and cruised hyp-marine fleets on the coast? Couldn't they squeeze us into defeat?"

Terry shook his head vehemently. "You remember Bromberg saying Asia will supply us with armament? The Unidum fleets will meet fleets of our own. As for the hyp-marines, the Pacific fleet seems ready to join us right now. The Brotherhood must have made particular efforts to influence those crews."

Williams thought a moment. "I can only hope for the best."

Suddenly Terry's eyes flashed. "Don't you see, Williams? If the revolution is successful, not only the Brain-control Act will go by the board, but also the Eugenics Law! Lila will be saved! When peace is restored I'll be free—and Lila will be free!"

Williams nodded. "If every Brother of Humanity had the incentives you and I have, victory would surely be ours."

* * * * *

A cold October wind chilled Williams as he stepped from the warm interior of an auto and crossed a stretch of rocky ground at the heels of a silent guide. Revealed in the moonlight were mountains to the east. They trudged on, zigzagging around rocky barriers until there loomed before them an immense boulder with a queer shape. At one side of it the guide thumped the ground with his heavy boot. It sounded hollow.

Suddenly and mysteriously, the boulder rolled away from an opening in the ground from which streamed a dim light. Williams smiled as he saw a lever arm extending from the pit to the inside of the cardboard "boulder." It was something original in the way of camouflaged underground entrances.

"The password," mumbled a voice from the pit.

"'Liberty in life and death'! Marshal Williams to see Major Agarth."

As Williams clambered down the wooden steps, the man below saluted and pulled the lever that swung the imitation boulder into place.

"This way, sir. Major Agarth is expecting you."

Descending inclines brought them to a door labeled "Headquarters."

"How are you, Williams?" cried Agarth, springing up from his map-strewn table. "You look well—thinner though."

"And tougher." Williams laughed. "The past two weeks of flying and jumping around have put me in physical trim."

"You seem to be enjoying all this," said Agarth. It was hard for him to understand the battle joy that had sunk into this man's soul in a land of fierce Zulus.

"I like to be in the right and to fight for it," agreed Williams.

"Let me congratulate you on your recent Nevada coup, Marshal Williams. Where did you ever conceive such a brilliant move?" Admiration was in Agarth's tones.

"Africa taught me that, Major," Williams said. "When a large force of Zulus once threatened to break through my meager line of Bantu warriors, I tried a simple trick, confident that their ferocity would overcome their judgment. At dawn, half my warriors sneaked by the Zulu encampment, purposely careless. The enemy pursued with triumphant shouts. But they changed to howls of alarm when the other half of my zealous Bantu plunged into their rear. In the Nevada skirmish, I did the same thing, substituting Unidum ships for Zulus, and our own craft for Bantu warriors. Then the anti-aircraft guns at Desert Point picked them off by the dozen."

"You speak lightly, yet if the Unidum fleet had broken through there, Base Number One would have been open to attack. General Bromberg made a wise move in appointing you squadron commander of the Nevada fleet."

WILLIAMS waved a deprecating hand.

"Thank you, Major. I have only done my best, which is what every Brother of Humanity is doing."

"Yes," said Agarth, haggardly. "But how little we have gained! So far, we have been on a desperate defensive. No loss is small gain, they say."

"After all, the moral victory is ours so far," Williams assured. "The Unidum boasted it would crush the rebellion in one week. *Two* weeks have passed and no fleet of theirs has crossed the Rockies to stay. And that naval battle three days ago! The Unidum Atlantic fleet retreating after losing two ships!"

"Only because the Unidum realized the foolhardiness of pressing forward at great loss. The Federation of Asia only too eagerly watches the internal strife of Unitaria. Some of them would greatly relish a chance to regain the 'face' they lost after their thorough licking in World War Two."

"What reports from our propaganda operatives?" asked Williams.

"There we have more optimistic tidings," returned Agarth, brightening. "The public, through our literature which exposes Molier, Jorgen and their company, is fast being organized by our agents, and prepared to present a weighty petition not only to cease the civil warfare, but demanding a Unidum impeachment. Europe is muttering against Molier. Street-corner speakers in New York are denouncing him. Williams, if we can hold out another two weeks, Molier will be a broken despot!"

"Then we'll hold out," Williams said condently. "If you hold your corner up here in Oregon so that coming through Canada is blocked for them, and I my niche down in Nevada to block off a sally through Mexico, the Unidum won't find a crack to crawl through to get to our West Coast stronghold. Kessel, Brighton and Walter have held the front along the Rockies without a sign of weakening."

Agarth nodded. "Hold out two weeks—just two weeks!" He changed his tone. "How is young Spath and that black servant of yours? What do you call him—Umboko—Mopoto?"

Williams chuckled. "Young Spath's fine. Has a good head on him. I made him my chief aide, and he's helped me make some vital decisions. I left him in charge to come here. The black man—M'bopo—has rounded out into a perfect valet. Follows me like a shadow, anticipates my slightest wish. I left him outside in the car."

When a sharp buzz sounded, Agarth tripped the radio-phone lever.

"Major Agarth speaking."

"Hello, Major," came from the loudspeaker. "General Bromberg. Has Marshal Williams arrived there yet?"

"Yes, he's here now."

"Ah, good. Then listen to me, both of you." The voice became excited. "Flash report from Operative B-Sixty-six in New York. New offensive planned by the Unidum! Large fleets preparing for attack at every point of the front—at dawn tomorrow! We must plan defenses, hold them at all costs."

After taking part in desperate plans for repelling a formidable mass attack by the Unidum forces, Dan Williams rushed back to his fleet.

* * * * *

"Terry, it looks bad," said Williams as their plane, the flagship, led the fleet to a temporary refueling center in southern California. "That titanic mass attack two weeks ago by the Unidum marked the turning point. Up till then we held them on the other side of the Rockies. Now Agarth has been pushed south, our eastern front has buckled, and we have been shoved north from the Mexican border. If the squeezing continues, our defeat is inevitable."

"But our underground strongholds! They are impregnable from air attack. As long as we hold them—"

"If we hide in them, the enemy can starve us out. The underground strongholds are fine for infantry bases, but in aerial warfare like the Unidum has launched, they are white elephants.

"Molier must have realized at once that if he gave the Brotherhood time to recruit a large infantry, the civil war might be drawn out to great lengths, because the entire West Coast could have been cut off from Unitaria. So he attacked swiftly with air forces. It's only been a month since the start of the revolution, and already the campaign is coming into its final stages."

"But surely all hope isn't lost for us?"

"No. If the tide of public opinion sweeps high enough, the Unidum will be forced to arbitrate. And any sort of arbitration is a victory for the Brotherhood. Indications are that already the

Unidum—or rather Dictator Molier—is at odds with public sentiment. His authority is near a break. That's why he's pressing us so ferociously. If he can defeat us quickly enough, he will be doubly powerful, probably oust Executive Ashley and become sole dictator."

THE radio-phone buzzed, and Williams picked up the receiver. He listened, then turned a grave face to Terry.

"The Unidum has completed its embargo on the Pacific! We are cut off from Asiatic ammunition and war supplies!"

"But our hyp-marine fleet—"

"Can do nothing," finished Williams. "The Unidum has concentrated almost its entire hyp-marine forces in the Pacific. And—Molier has bought off the Federation of Asia!"

* * * * *

In the largest chamber of the main underground stronghold in the mountain wilderness all the highest officers of the Brotherhood were assembled for emergency council. There was a general note of despair evident.

The Unidum had relentlessly driven the rebel forces inward from the north, south, and east. The large fleets of the Unidum held at bay the rebel fleets which had not been reinforced from Asiatic channels for a week. All general merchandise air traffic had been halted. Supplies, especially fuel for war-craft, were increasingly hard to obtain for the revolutionists.

Throughout Unitaria feeling against the Unidum was running high, and there was a growing demand that warfare cease and the government accede to the demands of the Brotherhood. But Molier refused to listen, and had fortified the capital with anti-aircraft guns and war craft. This step bid fair to disrupt Unitaria, for Europe was prepared to secede at a moment's notice.

Molier, maddened by the threat to his ambitions, had but one thought—to crush the rebellion and take control. His co-plotters, Scientists who fervently wished they had never listened to him but were too deeply involved to back out, held control of authority and issued the orders which daily drove the rebels backward.

Yet the responses to military commands were not as prompt as they should have been. Even the plane crews, long trained to obey orders without question, were sulky.

General Bromberg, broken and haggard, walked up and down the dais, haranguing the Brotherhood officers fitfully. That he felt all was lost was evident. Agarth was near him, apathetic, dismayed.

"Blasted hopes are all we have left, Williams," he said to the marshal, sitting beside him.

"Some of us still have the spirit to fight," said Williams.

"Fight?" Agarth replied wearily. "For what? Victory now would be bitter irony. Europe is ready to secede and is arming to fight the Unidum. Molier has embittered the very name Unidum for people everywhere."

"But if Molier and his crowd were out of the way, couldn't the Unidum regain its former prestige?"

"Who knows?" Agarth said blankly. "All Unitaria has been undermined. There is rioting every day in big cities. The Brotherhood's proclamations and Molier's propaganda have become confounded in the mass mind until nobody knows which is what."

"But an uncorrupted Unidum—wouldn't that cure all evils?"

"Certainly," replied Agarth a bit sharply. "But here are we, doomed to certain defeat. And with us dies that leadership that could have saved Unitaria from Molier and tyranny. With the Brotherhood destroyed, Molier will despotize Unitaria or plunge Europe and America into a war that will be ten times worse than this one we have gone through."

Williams mused for a moment. "Molier—tyranny. No Molier—no tyranny."

"What's that you say?" queried Agarth.

Williams eyed him a moment. "Molier is human. If he were assassinated then—"

"Are you mad? The capitol has been fortified. Molier has had a bodyguard since the beginning of the revolution. You would have to be a magician to kill him."

"Then I'll be one!" cried Williams, eyes glinting strangely. "Agarth, I want your authority and permission to leave base here. Give me ten fast ships and twenty men, and full tanks of fuel."

CHAPTER XVII

The Sun-Power Weapon

DUMBFOUNDED, Agarth stared speechlessly at Williams. It was at the tip of his tongue to ask Bromberg's advice, but one look at that distracted, nervous man decided him otherwise. After all, what difference would it make? The ten ships and twenty men could not hold out to the end, anyhow.

Agarth nodded. "Go if you will."

"I am coming along," said Terry who had stood by silently.

Williams looked into his eyes. "Of course," he agreed, "and M'bopo too. This might be our last great adventure together."

"How will we get past the Unidum lines?" asked Terry, as they left the room.

"Fly over. I doubt they'll pursue. Likely will figure we're deserters."

A swift plane took them to a landing where they were in the midst of what remained of a formerly great fleet, Williams' own fleet that he had commanded for four hectic weeks.

The word flew from tent to tent that the commander wanted to speak to his men on some mysterious matter. When they were assembled Williams looked them over with pride. These were the men with whom he had held the frontier against the Unidum. They had no uniforms, but on the breast of each was pinned the silver and blue enamel emblem of the Brotherhood. And in each face still was an eagerness and determination.

"Men, I need some of you tonight," shouted Williams, "on a mission of great danger. We are ringed in by the enemy and it is only a question of perhaps hours before the final battles. Our leaders are planning the last desperate defensive. But daring may sometimes accomplish what might cannot. I want twenty men to come with me—to New York!"

Confused murmurs quickly became cheers. Then a man's bellowing voice roared:

"Why can't we all go along, Commander, if you're figuring on storming the capitol?"

"No!" shouted Williams against an approving babel. "Ten ships have a chance to cross the enemy lines where the fleet would not, without becoming engaged in a battle to the finish. And this is a strategic move. Numbers will not help."

Men began crowding forward to be chosen. Williams looked at Terry.

"Take only those who are not married," suggested Terry.

Williams immediately shouted for all married men to return to their tents. They did, with some murmuring. Williams looked over the thirty-odd men, all young and eager. And yet they had joined the Brotherhood with sincere aims. "Liberty in Life and Death" meant much to them.

Williams picked out his twenty, and in another half-hour, eleven ships with full tanks arose with a roar of helicopter screws. Under radio-phone command from Williams' ship, they separated widely and bored swiftly eastward, climbing steadily.

In their own plane, Terry was in the pilot seat while Williams sat before the radio instruments. M'bopo, imperturbable, sat against the wall.

"We won't have to worry much about searchlights," said Williams as the enemy lines drew near, "because it's cloudy enough to conceal us. But a mechanical ear and high-flying scout-sentries could detect us." Into the mouthpiece he barked: "Full speed over the lines at ceiling. If pursued, maneuver to escape. Report immediately if forced to give battle."

Flying over land invisible in the gloom of night, Williams saw coming up the horizon the blue-white glare of searchlights whose beams could probe into the stratosphere itself. Where the beams were absent in long stretches he knew that the uncanny "mechanical ears" were there, and they could detect a single ship miles above. At their terrific speed, the enemy line swung directly below them.

Suddenly a beam swung purposefully in their direction, probed through cloudmist.

"One of those ears heard us," muttered Williams. "They tried to limelight us."

BUT after five minutes had passed no swift little scout had zoomed up from the ground, guided by radio, to hang on their tail like an unshakable bulldog, spotting them to chasers. Then it was too late, as the distance between ran into dozens of miles.

Williams' men all reported no pursuit.

"Draw together now on the line between Base Number One and New York," he ordered. "Cabin light on at full. Altitude three miles."

He snapped off the radio and spoke to Terry.

"We'll group with the other ships, Terry. Altitude three miles."

He switched on the cabin lights full and bright. At either wing tip and at the tail of the ovoid cabin, bright crimson lights flashed on. In fifteen minutes, blurs of light triangulated with red points appeared in all directions. At Williams' orders, the ships took up a flying V and stepladder formation, with his ship at the apex.

The ten ships which Williams had picked to accompany him on his mysterious mission were Sansruns, second in speed only to scouts, equipped with two machine-gun nests. Hung in a rack below the cabin were six small drop-bombs. Such ships were used for destroying bases of the enemy or blowing up ammunition dumps, being fast enough to escape all but scouts, and armed enough to have a good chance against combat ships.

At their height, above the commercial lanes, no other ships were sighted as hour after hour they pierced the night, heading into the heart of danger. And Williams alone knew what it was.

They approached New York from the south, having veered from a direct course. Yet they did not turn in the direction of the great metropolis, but skimmed the clouds east of it. As the first faint xanthic glows of dawn appeared, Williams contacted his men and rapidly ran through a series of twice-repeated commands. Then he spoke to Terry and M'bopo.

Looking at the beauty of dawn suffusing the eastern sky, heralding the coming of a late autumn sun, Williams noticed, a half-quadrant away, a spreading fan of shimmering rays of light centered from a spot on the wide bed of ocean. He thought it was an *aurora borealis* until it occurred to him that it was south of the sun.

"What is that mysterious light?" he asked Terry.

"It can only be the sun-power experimental station," said the young chemist. "They must have moved it since we last saw it from the stratosphere ship. The giant raft it's set up on is powered to move like any ship."

"But that light! I would say that it's billions of candle-power."

"Billions of heat calories, too!" supplied Terry. "I think I know the reason for it. They produce an enormous amount of sun-power, but having no use for it until it's commercially practicable, I suppose they cast off the excess energy of the day in that way."

Williams' eyes widened thoughtfully. A train of thought that started in his mind was abruptly terminated as Terry called:

"Here we go—down!"

The planes hummed downward from the misty heights, like phantoms in the ghostly light of dawn. An immense structure loomed up, only partially illuminated as night lights were gradually turned off. Before their altitude lessened by half, New York was visible as a crown of light, and beside it to the east was the lime-whiteness of the Unidum capitol.

"We're discovered already," said Terry, pointing to where a wheeling scout ship with the Unidum emblem on its wings swung in a great circle and sped away toward New York. "They could recognize our ships immediately as part of the rebel forces."

"No matter," said Williams quietly. "Once we land, we're safe for the time being."

Onto the deserted landing roof of the Long Island Tide-station, the tiny fleet landed. Williams told his men to stay with their ships until further orders, then motioned to Terry and M'bopo to follow him.

AT the door Joe Manners stood waiting, consternation and bewilderment on his face.

"I got your call during the night," he said. "But for the life of me, I can't figure out—"

"We're here for a little grimmer purpose than that last time," vouchsafed Williams. "Before it was just our lives we were concerned with. Now much more is involved."

"But this whole region is patrolled by Unidum scout ships!" Manners cried nervously. "They'll attack—"

"How can they attack ships on a roof? And they won't dare to try any bombing."

"I see," agreed Manners, calming down. "Strange that the Unidum should leave the tide-station here open to attack."

"They had no suspicion that this might happen," said Williams. "It's always the obvious that escapes notice. If there had been armed opposition awaiting us as we descended—well, I was prepared to sell my life dearly." He shrugged. "Right now I must know a few things, then perhaps I'll get a workable plan. I came here just to be within striking distance of Molier—who must be put out of the way or stripped of power and authority."

"You mean you came here without authority?" cried Manners. "Oh, I know you are a marshal in the Brotherhood, and a commander in the Air Forces, but surely you are under orders from General Bromberg—"

Williams shook his head. "Strictly on my own, except that Major Agarth sanctioned my leaving with ten ships. I'm a great believer in inspirational effort. When there is trouble I get as near the root of it as possible, worry a couple of plans until they crystallize, then go to it. Spur-of-the-moment things often shape the future. Africa taught me that. Back there at Base One little could be done to forestall the defeat of our forces. It was while talking to Agarth about it that it came to me—no Molier, no tyranny."

"You mean?"

"That my sole aim now is to get Molier!"

"But how, man?" asked Manners, swiftly repeating what Williams had already heard about Molier being unreachable."

"To *get* Molier," repeated Williams quietly, as though he had not heard. "Assassination, impeachment, overthrow—something!"

"Which is what the Brotherhood has been trying!" There was a note of scorn in Manners' voice for Williams' mad aspirations. "Everything has been tried—everything! By the Brotherhood, the influential heads of industry, *the Unidum itself!* What has happened? No one knows, except that Europe will secede to escape the tangle in America. Molier still plots, while all Unitaria is cracking apart!"

"Hasn't the exposure of Molier and his bunch as evil weakened his power at all? Surely that should cause his impeachment."

"Not yet. His accusers are Bromberg and Hagen, outlaws by Unidum decree.

They are rebels, about to be defeated. Molier has somehow convinced the weak-willed Executive Ashley that the Brotherhood is a sheep in wolf's clothing. It's a vicious circle of intrigue. And there's nothing we can do!!"

"That, I'm not sure about," declared Williams stoutly. "First, a few questions. This tide-station produces all the electrical current, not only of various cities, but of the capitol. Right?" At a nod from Manners, he went on: "And at the throw of a switch or two, you can cut off that supply?"

"Yes, but—"

"No buts at a time like this. There is no one to prevent such a move, is there?"

"No. The station's employees all work below in the generator and machine rooms. They are not allowed up here. Of course"—he glanced apprehensively into the sky where several striped ships hovered high in the air—"there may be interference from them!"

Williams shrugged. "If they should try any attacking maneuvers, my men will know what to do. And we have all the advantages—stationary aim, massed guns, highly-experienced gunners." He turned. "You have a radio with which you can contact the Capitol?"

"Yes, in the control room."

THE cheerful brightness of early morning had now overspread all the region. On the blue blanket of endless ocean, an occasional buff or silvery hyp-marine skimmed the waves. How serene things looked! How peaceful! And yet the affairs of men had reached a crisis. There was a lurking Nemesis that the light of sun and the cheer of day could not dispel like morning mists.

"Now an important question. Have you any food?" Williams smiled. "I can't think properly when I'm hungry."

The well-stocked larders of the tide-station yielded breads and cakes and cold meats. Probably the pantryman was surprised that the superintendent in the sanctum above should suddenly have the appetite of thirty men. But it was not for him to question.

Williams and Terry passed the food to the men. While they were eating, Williams spoke to them.

"Men, we're about as safe right here as we could be anywhere, probably safer than at Base One. Those fellows up there"—he jerked a thumb in the direction of circling Unidum ships—"won't try any bombing, and they can't attack without danger of smashing, to get in machinegun range. What our next move will be depends on certain things. Until then, stay here with your ships."

As Terry and Williams entered the master control-room where Manners awaited them, a clicking sound was heard.

"The Unidum call-signal!" said Manners, paling. "They'll want to know why rebel ships are here!"

Williams' voice rang clear. "Manners, I'll take the call. You get over to your switchboard and put your hand on the switch that shuts off the current that goes to the capitol."

"What good—"

"Do it!" said Williams quietly, but there was a wealth of command in his tone. "This is the time for initiative and action. What the result will be, I cannot say, but a chance is always worth taking. And as your superior officer in the Brotherhod, I command you both!"

CHAPTER XVIII

Battle In the Sky

MANNERS hesitated no longer but ran to the control-board where finger-flipped switches could do magic with thousands of kilowatts of electricity.

Williams strode to the wall radiophone and tripped the loudspeaker lever. An authoritative voice rang through the room.

"Unidum capitol calling Joe Manners, superintendent of the Long Island Tide-station. Eleven ships, apparently part of the rebel forces, are on the landing roof. The Unidum demands an explanation."

"And the Unidum will get an explanation," returned Williams in emphatic tones. "The tide-station is at present in the hands of a marshal of the Brothers of Humanity, in my hands."

"The Unidum accordingly demands that your rebel ships leave at once."

"Leave? Do you think we are playing a game? We are here to stay. If you care to attack, try it. My gunners are experts."

There was a confused murmur from the phone, then another voice spoke, an articulate voice.

"The Unidum is prepared to make an offer, due to the fact that the tide-station is—ah—our special consideration. We offer to waive any charges of treason against you, if you will quietly surrender to the Unidum. We will send over a sealed and signed exemption."

Williams laughed harshly. "You take us for traitors! *No!*"

"Then we shall—"

"You had better listen to me," interrupted Williams. "Unless a demand of mine is granted, Joe Manners, at my command, will cut off the electrical current to the capitol! Your heating equipment will cease to function; your elevators will not run; the ventilating system will not operate; a dozen other little things will paralyze the internal workings of the capitol. Even your radio-phone system will be useless. It also is easy to overload the transformers at the Unidum capitol from this tide-station, and ruin them. Would you care to suffer all those calamities for several days before the damage could be repaired?"

Confusion again from the loudspeaker. Then the voice. "What is your demand?"

"Impeachment of Executive Molier according to the charges of the Brotherhood!"

First there was dead silence, then a babel of voices and shouts. A heated debate seemed to be in progress.

"That was a bombshell," said Williams.

The confusion from the loudspeaker grew tumultuous. Snatches of words indicated that the Brotherhood had friends in the heart of the Unidum. Finally a roaring voice was heard:

"Fellow Scientists! The Brotherhood has demanded impeachment of Molier! The people have cried for it! It should be—"

"Silence, fool!" A flurry of shouts, one unmistakable groan, then a click and silence.

Williams gripped the back of a chair tightly. Had his daring demand turned the tide of opinion in the Unidum? What was going on back of that cryptic silence from the capitol?

Suddenly the radio-phone clicked on again. A voice, deeper and more resonant than the other rang out, vibrant with suppressed fury.

"You fools at the tide-station, there will be no answer to your childish demand! I will send a hundred ships to rake you with bullets!"

A click and silence.

"That was Molier himself!" spluttered Manners.

Livid fury was in Williams' face. *"Sarto je Bru!* He has become a veritable monster!" He swung toward the superintendent. "Manners, burn out the capitol transformers!"

Manners had no thought of remonstrating after one look at the irate man with sun-tanned skin and flashing blue eyes. He sighed and threw certain switches.

"It's done," he choked. "Transformers burnt out . . . fused . . ."

WILLIAMS looked at him and understood. Manners had been superintendent of the tide-station for twenty years. It had been his pride to keep the gigantic power station running smoothly and efficiently. It must be hard for him deliberately to spoil his record.

"I'm sorry, Manners," Williams said in a softened voice. "But it had to be. All this is bigger than our personal affairs." Then his voice grew hard again. "Molier asked for it, and got it.

Let's go, Terry. Manners—"

"I stay here," said the superintendent firmly. "I'll take my chances. Good-by, Williams—for I think this time it is good-by."

When they jumped into their ship, Terry pointed to where a massed group of warcraft winged its way.

"Full gun, men!" barked Williams into his radio-phone. "Follow this ship."

The eleven ships arose and flew out over the ocean. The pursuing craft, heavier and less speedy, soon gave up the chase. Any way the rebels were doomed, as they could not land on water.

Williams eyed three scout ships hanging on their rear. For his present purposes, they were obnoxious. He called his ships on general wave and tapped out a short message in code. It called for maneuvers often successful in eliminating scouts.

Suddenly his ships separated into two groups, one of them decelerating, the other cutting upward. The scouts, speed unchecked, careened past the first group, veered upward frantically, to run into a leaden hail from the other group. The ocean accepted three more humans to join the many in her watery depths.

"Now tell me before I burst!" cried Terry. "Where are we heading?"

"Remember, Terry, I do things on the spur of the moment. My present inspiration is to capture and take over control of the sun-power station."

"And do what with it?" asked Terry, astounded.

But instead of answering, Williams snapped the radio-phone lever and apprised his men of the same thing.

The stupendousness of the sun-power station became apparent as they drew near. It appeared to be a jumble of skeleton towers surmounted with glinting umbrellas of mirrored apparatus, immense areas of curved surfaces, and large drums of broken glass. And certainly it was one of the largest man-made things.

Circling at a convenient height, Williams noticed that the center of the raft, an area of two or three acres, was taken up with wooden structures which could only be the living quarters of the denizens of this artificial island. Several black figures stood staring upward. Beside the buildings was a cleared space, obviously a landing field where reposed several aircraft—warships. But there were only five of the fighting ships.

He turned to the radio-phone: "Ready for battle, men!"

At his instructions, Terry dipped low over the buildings as though to drop a bomb. Uniformed men ran toward the combat ships. They were accepting the challenge!

The Unidum ships arose to where the waiting rebels poised. Eleven to five. Yet it was not to be an unequal skirmish, for the Unidum ships had three guns each, one throwing a small high-powered shell. Williams cursed that he did not have two gunners and one pilot to each ship.

The structural conglomeration beneath was sliding away. The people on the sun-power station were simply moving away from the scene of battle, so that falling planes would not smash and ruin expensive apparatus.

Williams spoke into the phone:

"Take altitude! No formation! Pick out your antagonist and duel him—*and in the name of heaven, do your best!*"

Terry, startled, saw Williams clambering up the short steel ladder to the trap which opened to the machine gun nests. Then Terry turned back to his controls grimly. As much depended on his handling of the ship as did on the man above!

AT a mile above the water's surface, and well clear of the moving sun-power station came the clash of battle. The rebels depended on their speed and flexibility and greater numbers. But each of the Unidum ships had three grim gunners, so where the real advantage lay could not be said.

To Williams, inexperienced with a machinegun, it seemed like bedlam. There was the ululating roar of speed-shifting motors, the *rat-a-tat* of guns, the flare and sharp report of small shells, the crazy gyration of the plane, the biting cold of rushing air, the helplessness in a strange, open perch. Then, in a flash, it all cleared. There was a gun under his hand, a target now and then.

His finger pulled; his arm vibrated; his hand guided the handle, pointing the muzzle at a striped ship that swung downward past them. He shouted aloud when one of the gunners slumped into his cockpit. First blood! A flash from the big gun, and something shrieked past his ear.

Sarto! That was close! But he must keep his eyes everywhere and swing the gun without hesitation. And so it went on for what seemed hours, but in reality were minutes.

Williams' men fought their best, and it was just a little better than the best of the Unidum airmen. Ship after ship spun out of control and fluttered to the ocean, or caught fire to fall like a meteor. Then only two ships remained, both rebels.

Williams descended to the cabin.

"We've won, Terry. But at—a price." He shook his head and called the other ship: "Descend and follow. We take over the sun-power station immediately."

The reply from the other ship was delayed, then a voice, pain-filled:

"Yes, Commander—we descend—gunner killed—wounded. Good-by and—good luck."

The other ship, behaving erratically, bespoke the weakening hand of a dying pilot.

"But you've not died in vain," said Williams softly. *"I swear it!"*

The other ship lurched drunkenly, then plunged downward.

"Well, Terry, it's up to us." Williams' voice was husky. "Where's M'bopo?"

"Why, he followed you out! Didn't he—"

"Lord! Then he must have fallen. I didn't see him."

Already numbed by the many deaths during the past hour, the loss of the black man seemed the final strain. But Williams breathed deeply and fastened his attention on the sun-power station as Terry landed the ship on it. The two stepped out with pistols in hand, menacing the small crowd that had gathered, before Williams spoke to the half-dozen men in the blue capes of Scientists.

"This sun-power station is now in the hands of the Brotherhood, or the rebels, as you choose to call us. With your armed escort gone, you have no choice but to recognize my authority."

"We realize that," said one of the Scientists, "and we're glad of it!"

"Glad to be in rebel hands?" asked Williams incredulously.

"Certainly. We would never have let those five Unidum ships attack you had we been able to prevent it. Let me . . . Will you please order that man away from the gun? He looks ready to open fire any minute!"

Williams whirled—and cried with joy. In the second of the gun cock-pits, was M'bopo. With his hands on the gun, he looked indeed ready to spout flame and lead.

"Come down from there!" shouted Williams in Bantu dialect.

The black man clambered from the gun cupola and leaped to the landing floor. Williams strode back to the impatient Scientists.

"Now, sirs," if you will explain—"

"Just this," said the previous spokesman. "We, aboard this experimental sun-power station, of course, have been in touch with national events via radio, and have from the first favored the Brotherhood. We realize the insidiousness of Brain-control and the threat of brain-enslavement. Practically all our lives we six here have labored to produce power from the sun, and our goal is near. Despairing indeed was the news that the tyrant Molier was making a bid for absolute dictatorship. When the Brotherhood announced its opposition, and military revolution broke out, we hoped Molier would be broken. Apparently"—his voice became heavy—"it can't be done."

"And perhaps it can!" contradicted Williams. "With your help, with your pledges to give me any and all aid, the tide may be turned yet!"

"I give that pledge myself," said the Scientist. Others nodded vigorously.

"Would you even"—Williams swept an eye at the jungle of towered apparatus surrounding them—"willingly endanger all this, your life work?"

THE Scientist swallowed but answered quickly.

"We of the sun-power station have more than once wished we could save Unitaria from threatened evil, at any price. But in what way can science serve?"

"How soon can you reach New York with this motored raft?" Williams asked.

"Possibly by dawn tomorrow."

"Can you swing those night beams which throw off excess sun-energy in any direction?"

The Scientist pursed his lips thoughtfully. "Yes, with a little alteration in machinery."

"Good!" cried Williams exultantly. "Now, have you an all-wave transmitter?"

"In the building there," said the Scientist.

"I must get in touch with General Bromberg!" shouted Williams as he madly dashed to the building.

A man seated before the control panel of an all-wave radio looked up inquiringly.

"Eighteen point two centimeters—full power, and hurry!" barked Williams. "Ask for General Bromberg!"

CHAPTER XIX

The Reckoning

QUIETLY Terry stepped into the room, just in time to begin coding a message Williams wrote hastily. The Brotherhood's code had never been worked out by the Unidum intelligence service. The vowels of its key word were changed every ten hours by the clock.

Agarth answered from Base One.

"Who calls?"

"Williams—Marshal Williams."

"Great guns! I had no hope of hearing your voice again. General Bromberg is ill, Williams."

"Then listen, Agarth! Take this code. I'll give it twice."

The message translated was:

YOU MUST HOLD OUT AT BASE ONE UNTIL DAWN TOMORROW. FIGHT AS YOU'VE NEVER FOUGHT BEFORE, BUT HOLD OUT! THE SUN-POWER STATION, THE MOST POWERFUL AND INVINCIBLE WAR-MACHINE IN THE WORLD, IS IN MY HANDS. AT DAWN TOMORROW I WILL THREATEN TO BURN THE CAPITOL TO A CINDER IF MOLIER IS NOT OUSTED.

In code came back:

WILL HOLD OUT IF HADES FALLS!

The gray of dawn revealed a huge bulk in the East River before the capitol of Unitaria. Like a sentient giant the sun-power station frowned majestically over the seat of government. Buzzing aircraft hovered like flies, darting and spinning in curiosity. Suddenly a blinding beam of light shot upward from the internal mazes of the station, and two unlucky ships whiffed into flame. The beam swung awesomely downward until it just barely touched the peak of a dome on a capitol building. The peak glowed red, then white, then fell away molten.

What internal revolution had occurred in the capitol after Williams' ultimatum the watchers aboard the sun-power station did not know. That the Unidum had fallen away from Molier, they did know, and also knew that the Unidum was prepared to call off hostilities against the Brotherhood, and negotiate. The sun-power Scientists were in hearty agreement.

Two hours after dawn, a ship arose from a roof landing of the capitol, engines beating frantically. From somewhere came the flash and report of an anti-aircraft gun. A part of the rising ship's wing crumpled, and for seconds the craft gyrated madly downward. Then the pilot must have regained partial control for, sagging in the air, about to plunge downward, it miraculously kept an even keel and coasted to land in the center of the man-made island of sun-mirrors.

From the badly smashed cabin crawled a tall, gaunt figure. His clothing indicated that he was one of the two executive heads of Unitaria. His blue cape marked him as a Scientist. He straightened up to face a group of men who instantly recognized him.

Standing at the head of the group, facing him, was a robust man whose tanned face indicated that he had known rigorous climates. The gaunt man, wild-eyed, poured out a flood of words. The tanned man answered sternly. The gaunt one again broke out in a torrent of language, and the other man made a threatening move toward him.

Of a sudden the gaunt man's hand whipped into his robe and came out with a tiny tubular object. It was pointed straight at the tanned man and from it came a dull blue flash. But the killing charge of the lightning pistol did not find its mark. A man whose skin was black had leaped between the two men. It was he who sagged to the wooden landing, lifeless.

For a moment everyone froze. Then, with a shout, the tanned man leaped for his gaunt antagonist in quivering rage. The gaunt man seemed to have the strength of a madman, so that even the other's steel muscles were matched. Suddenly the blue flash again appeared. The gaunt man fell.

The tanned man looked at his vanquished foe a moment, then turned to kneel beside the black man, reverently.

Molier, arch-tyrant of 1973, was dead.

* * * * *

EARL HACKWORTH could hardly control his voice.

"Tell me all about it, Dan—Terry. How did you get away from the tide-station? How did you meet Agarth? How—"

"All in good time, Earl," said Williams. "The thing now is—Lila!"

"Oh, yes, yes," agreed Hackworth. The excitement of seeing them after weeks of separation—and eternities of events—had thrown him into a turmoil. "She's still in the hospital, sleeping as peacefully as ever."

"What a relief!" breathed Terry, and added softly: "Lila!"

Then he glanced at Williams. "But—Agarth called—don't you remember? He will be here, and with some sort of parade in your honor with him, to take you to witness the ceremonies which take the Brain-control Act and the Eugenics Law from the statutes, and the formal announcement of Europe's agreement to veto secession."

"Terry," answered Williams slowly, "you've been with me through thick and thin. You've stuck with me even when you must have thought I'd gone mad. I'm going to the hospital with *you* now."

"But Agarth—"

"Hang Agarth—for the time being! Come on!"

During the drive, no word was spoken. Terry, face aglow, seemed lost in dreams. Williams seemed depressed. He could not forget M'bopo, who was to be buried in state.

At the Unidum Hospital Hackworth said to the attendant: "Miss Lila Hackworth, Room Two-o-two-four."

"I'm sorry, sir," said the white-clad woman, "but she's gone!"

"GONE?"

The word seemed to echo and re-echo in thunder. Terry was shouting it incredulously. Williams placed a hand on his shoulder.

"You must be mistaken," Hackworth said confidently. "I saw her just yesterday. She's that sleeping case."

"I know, sir. But she *is* gone!"

"What do you mean!" cried Terry.

"Oh, I knew I shouldn't have let him—" The woman seemed about to become hysterical. "But what else could I do? Professor Jorgen—he's superintendent of Unidum hospitals and has authority—he took her away last night."

"Last night he had not a shred of authority!" shouted Terry. "He's to be exiled!"

"Well, he had a pistol in his hand, and the look in his eyes—horrible!" The woman lowered her voice. "We didn't dare try to stop him. He—he was stark mad!"

"But why should he take Lila away?" asked Hackworth tremulously.

"In insanity," said Williams, "sometimes an idea grows to mountainous proportions. Perhaps the exasperation of being balked in marrying Lila has obsessed him. Where did he take her?"

"I don't know, sir. But he has a private summer home at Edgewood, in the Catskill Mountains. And his plane went north."

"Let's go," said Williams grimly.

A half-hour later, Hackworth piloted his Sansrun away from New York to the north. Terry sat pale and drawn.

"Hurry, Hackworth!" he pleaded, agonized. "That madman might kill her!"

"Not that," soothed Williams. "He probably took her to his home, tried to waken her but being unsuccessful, likely by now some other fancy will be occupying his distorted brain."

Not a mile east of Edgewood, in a quiet setting of hills and forest, they found Jorgen's woodland retreat. As Hackworth brought his ship down they saw another ship there that could only be Jorgen's.

Williams held up a hand and whispered: "Let's reconnoitre. Hearing us land, he may be laying for us with a gun."

The low, rambling cottage had many windows and at each of them Williams, with a lightning pistol in his hand, looked in stealthily. He saw nothing. When they had completely circled the house Williams looked puzzled.

"Looks deserted, as though it's been shut up since the summer. Could it be he isn't here, after all?"

"But his ship!" whispered Hackworth. "He must be here!"

Williams thought a moment.

[*Turn page*]

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"We'll try the door."

It opened squeakily to reveal a dusty hallway.

"Tracks in the dust!" said Terry.

WILLIAMS nodded and followed them. They led to the open door of a lighted room. An unmistakable odor came to them—a chemical laboratory! Williams raced into the room, with Terry not a step behind.

"I've been waiting for you," said a calm voice. "No, don't shoot. I have this needle above the girl's heart!"

Professor Jorgen, heavy-browed and thin-lipped, stood over the limp form of Lila on a couch. In his hand a large hypodermic was poised. A downward thrust would pierce her heart.

In utter silence the three glared. Jorgen's lips were half snarling, half smiling.

"I heard your plane land and surmised someone had come for the girl. This girl would be my wife, but for a strange malady. She's mine, do you hear?" His voice rose in a shriek.

"Just a minute, Professor Jorgen," said Williams. "Perhaps—"

"Nothing you can say will interest me. Listen to what *I* have to say!" The eyes gleamed with devils. "A strange malady has put this girl into a trance, as though a witch had cast an evil spell upon her. But it is no sorcery. Science can cure her. I am a Scientist!" His voice had a remnant of former pride in it. "Since last night I have been working, knowing I must awaken her before she dies of under-nourishment. In this hypodermic is a fluid that will awaken her. You can't stop me, either! And when she awakes, I will marry her, because she loves me!"

Williams felt Terry straining forward, and breathed a word in his ear.

"Wait!"

He looked back at the insanely gloating madman. That needle—if that hand would draw away for a brief second . . .

"Professor Jorgen," said Williams quickly. "You mistake us. We haven't come for the girl."

"What?" barked the Scientist.

"We care nothing about the girl. We are here in behalf of the Unidum. Due to your past services, you are to be given your freedom."

For a moment mad eyes bored at Williams with uncanny cunning. Williams watched like a hawk. That hand . . .

"Not exiled," Jorgen muttered. "Free! They won't prosecute me!"

Seconds stretched into a dozen eternities, while he blinked, alternately suspicious and incredulous, perplexed. Then his hand which had poised so long over the girl's heart, drew slowly upward. Williams watched as inch by inch it was raised, as the insane Scientist gradually gave credence to the statement.

The moment had come. A dull blue flash leaped from Williams' upraised pistol. Terry yelled and dashed forward, for with tigerlike quickness, the maniac had plunged the needle straight for Lila's heart! Even in his death, he had taken her along!

Terry slumped beside the couch and broke into dry sobs. "Lila! Darling! Am I too late to call you back to life?"

HER pallid face looked like the face of death, and the heartbroken Terry bowed his head in numbing sorrow. He did not see the two men behind him whisper excitedly, nor did he see the fluttering of the girl's eyelids. Dulled with the mists of long sleep, the soft brown eyes opened, fastened on the face beside her, and cleared suddenly.

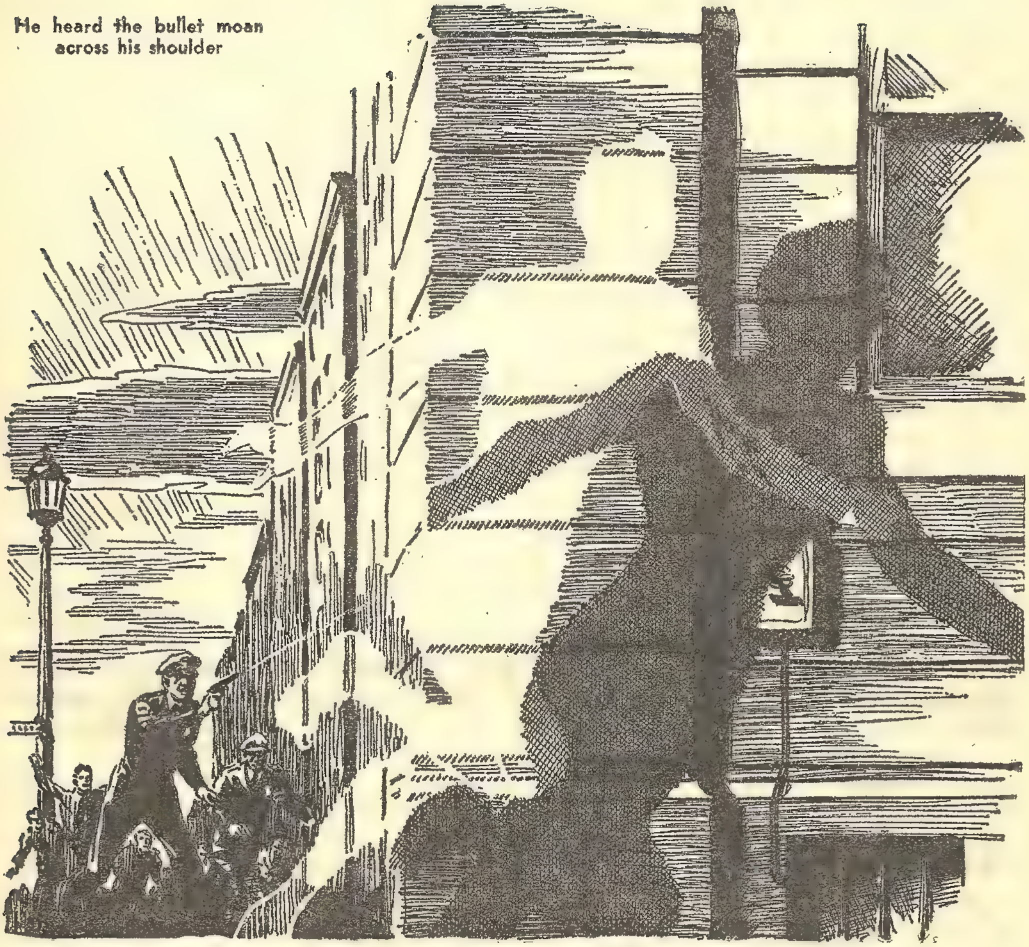
"Terry!"

A moment later Terry descended from the clouds enough to wonder about that death-stroke that he had apparently seen pierce the girl's heart. Hackworth pointed to Lila's breast. The hypodermic, driven downward by a hand suddenly bereft of life, had merely tangled in her heavy hospital gown without even scratching the girl's skin.

Williams, with tears of happiness in his eyes, turned to his cousin as the young couple clung to each other, murmuring endearments.

"Earl," Williams said, "we can wait outside. I really feel quite unnecessary in here. Don't you?"

He heard the bullet moan across his shoulder



INVISIBLE

By ERIC FRANK RUSSELL

Mason thought invisibility made him the perfect criminal!

HASTILY putting down the green vial "Shorty" Mason flopped upon the settee. His legs twitched, his fingers trembled uncontrollably. The serum from the vial was a veritable hell's brew. He could feel it searing inside, shooting like heated mercury through his tortured veins.

"Highly radioactive," Professor Dainton had said.

It had meant nothing to Mason then but it meant a lot now.

Shorty lay back, sweat beading his forehead, while Pepito, the professor's

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Mexican hairless dog, made weird noises out in the yard. According to Dainton's estimate the liquid from the vial should take effect in half an hour. It had taken only fifteen minutes to perform its work on the dog.

Agony gave way to a dull listless ache accompanied by sensations of effervescence in the bloodstream. Mason looked at his naked legs, saw no alteration in their appearance. He stretched his nude form full length and pondered while he waited. Shorty Mason was on his uppers but with the means to easy money right at hand—Dainton unwittingly had provided the means.

If Dainton had not got himself run over by a car there would have been no need for Mason to take a chance with the scientist's discovery. But Dainton was dead and it was up to Mason to give the stuff in the vial its first chance to work on a human being. What it did to Pepito it could do to him, he felt certain.

Only the previous Wednesday he and the professor had stood in the backyard and observed Pepito after he had been inoculated with the serum. The dog had scuttled around with its customary joyful genuflexions but neither of them could follow its movements. For the dog had become invisible.

Stealing another look at his legs Mason found them becoming diaphanous, indefinite. He blinked, looked again, smiled grimly as he realized the experiment was going to succeed.

TEN minutes later he stood in front of a full-length mirror, stroking a closely shaved head that could not be seen, feeling smooth legs that were not apparent in the glass. Perfect mimicry!

What the chameleon could do in a couple of hours his body could do instantaneously and with complete faithfulness.

His chest reproduced the batik pattern of the wallpaper behind him. His feet and ankles simulated the grained oak skirting board. When he moved the patterns moved in reverse and held their relative positions. The whole thing was incredible, yet true—the truth evident in the empty mirror. He had made himself transparent—invisible to the normal eye.

He had thought Dainton foolish enough when the latter picked him up at the prison gates and gave him a new start as an assistant. He had been certain that Dainton was unbalanced when he found that the scientist's sole object in life was to satisfy his curiosity about chameleons. Looking at the blank mirror he knew that Dainton had been quite mad to devote half a lifetime to the development of something that was of no practical use except to crooks.

The old investigator had talked a lot about his eccentric work. Once he had handed Mason a photograph of a blossom-laden bush.

"Some of those are flowers, others are not," he had said. "They look like blossoms but they aren't."

"What are they then?" Shorty had asked.

"Examples of perfect mimicry," the professor had replied. "They are clusters of plant-sucking Phormnia, insects of the Fulgoridae family. Individually, they look like tiny plume-backed wax-coated porcupines of the insect world and they are found in the Bengal Dooars and the jungles of Assam. Their mimicry is so truthful that even birds, perching on the same branch, can be deceived."

Mason had gaped at the photograph, tried hard to discern which blooms were really blooms and which were insects. It was impossible to tell.

"Countless centuries of evolution moulded that protective ability," the professor had declared, "yet the chameleon can exercise similar powers in a mere couple of hours and adapt the effect to circumstances."

"So what?" had been Mason's query.

"It is a longer jump from a million years to a couple of hours than it is from a couple of hours to a split second." A determined gleam in his eyes, Dainton had added, "What I am seeking is the secret of instantaneous camouflage!"

Then Dainton had plunged into a long

involved speech about chameleons employing some glandular substance that could do to the atoms and molecules of the epidermis what adrenalin could do to the heart. He had talked about chameleons speeding up their vibratory rate until they were reflecting those frequencies of the spectrum compatible with their surroundings. He thought the process could be improved, perfected. Mason had dutifully agreed without having the faintest idea of what all the talk was about.

But now he knew that Dainton had found success on the eve of his death. How the formula functioned Mason neither knew nor cared. The effect was what he wanted.

Bending toward the mirror Mason saw the faint outline of himself. It was difficult to discern. He decided that he could see it because he was standing still and his surface was nearer to the glass than was the surface he was imitating.

Taking a hand-mirror he turned around and surveyed his back. It reproduced the batik. All sides of him merged into their respective backgrounds, regardless of the angles from which they were viewed. To all intents and purposes he was an invisible man.

Satisfied, Mason decided that now was the time to collect the John Legattrick Company's payroll and thus turn another scientific achievement to the practical use of crime.

At the front door force of habit drove his hand toward his hat and coat. He resisted the impulse and paused with his fingers on the doorlock. The hall mirror gave him the confidence he required to step into the street stark naked. He set his heavy jaw, opened the door and boldly stepped out.

The street was drab and sullen beneath the hidden sun but the air was warm enough to compensate for Mason's lack of clothes. A fat little man hurried along the sidewalk, his feet pattering on the shadowless concrete.

He headed straight toward Mason, his eyes studying the dull horizon, his mind occupied to the exclusion of all else. Mason dodged him with a thrill of apprehension, rapidly followed by a feeling of intense relief. The fat man trotted on.

FOURTH Avenue was like a game of tag with a million blindfolded players. Mason had to sneak around standing people, sidestep walkers and jump from the paths of men in a hurry. Several times he narrowly avoided a betraying bump. Once he barely escaped being run over by a taxi.

The clock over the First Federal Bank said two minutes to eleven when Mason reached its doors. He had timed himself beautifully. Within two or three minutes a cashier and an armed guard would arrive to claim the Legattrick weekly payroll of forty thousand dollars.

A glance at the still-clouded sky—then Mason jumped for a compartment in the bank's revolving door, entering close behind an unsuspecting customer. Moving to the farther wall he walked to and fro while he waited. His body was marble against the marble slabs. His constant motion permitted no pecu-

[*Turn page*]

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liarity in perspective that might arouse suspicion in the sharp-eyed.

Forty thousand dollars was a nice little sum, he mused. A smart fellow could get around with a wad that size. All he had to do was take it, run like blazes and hide it in a safe spot from which it could be retrieved later. He had marked out such a place a mere three hundred yards away.

Once he'd dumped the money his pursuers—if any—would have nothing visible to pursue. It was the easiest stunt in the whole history of larceny—and the green vial held enough doses for a dozen more similar exploits. Mason ceased his pondering as the bank's door spun at the stroke of eleven.

A man came through the door, a lumpy man with a big leather bag grasped in his right fist. He was followed by a lean lanky fellow whose sharp eyes flickered beneath the visor of his peaked cap and who carried a shoulder holster prominently in view. The first was the John Legattrick Company's cashier—the other his bodyguard.

Both men walked across the floor to the glass holes yawning above the counter. The first man dumped his bag on the mahogany and pushed a paper through a gap in the bulletproof glass. The bodyguard hung around and chewed his fingernails.

Rolls of coinage were shoved across the counter, checked on a slip held by the lumpy man, then placed in his bag. Finally came the paper money in the form of a flat square packet. Legattrick's cashier reached for it—and grasped air.

The bundle clutched in his sweating right hand, Mason raced madly for the door. None could see him but all could see the loot. His imprisoned heart pounded frantically on the bars of his ribs, his ears strained in expectation of shouts and curses. His shoulder muscles cringed in anticipation of impinging tearing bullets.

No warning yells followed him. No missiles slammed into his spine. The silence was worse than an uproar. He guessed, as he reached the door, that his feet had been faster than the onlookers' minds. He was making a successful getaway while they stood dumbfounded by the sight of a packet departing of its own volition.

He raced through the door like a charging bull, left it whirling behind him. Two hundred yards to the corner, another hundred to the junk-filled grating outside the pawnbroker's shop. If no snoopers were hanging around he could cache the money there and wander home at his leisure.

The hullabaloo started when he was within fifty yards of the corner. An excited mob poured out of the bank and saw the payroll bobbing fantastically above the pavement. Howls of *"Stop!"* roars of *"Get him!"* were followed by two sharp reports and a whine of lead above Mason's head.

Sprinting for the corner he almost collided with a pedestrian whose eyes bulged at the magically suspended package. Mason swung an unseen but heavy fist to the fellow's jaw, and the man toppled to the ground. Shorty leaped over him and rounded the corner.

Eighty yards—forty—ten—separated him from the grating. He reached it a few seconds before his pursuers got to the corner. There were several people near but none had noticed the package; all were staring towards the junction from which came sounds of thudding feet and angry voices.

Mason bent, rammed the payroll between the side of the grating and the dusty window that ran down into the well. The package crimped, slid down, jammed again, then burst through. It flopped into the months'-old litter at the bottom of the well.

BENEATH the dull but broken sky the hunting pack swirled round the corner a full two hundred strong. They filled the narrow road from wall to wall, their numbers too great to evade.

Grinning to himself Mason raced up the road. A quick burst to the farther corner and he would reach the main avenue and lose the baying hounds for good. The money was safe, he was safe, the world was a wonderful place for guys who knew all the answers. Even Olympic champions didn't get forty thousand dollars for a quarter mile trot. The sun burst through the clouds, beaming in sympathy with his happiness.

Behind, the pack howled. Someone fired a shot and Mason heard the bullet moan across his shoulder. He increased his pace, still grinning. Let the fools shoot at random if it relieved their feelings.

Another shot, nearer this time. A hoarse command to halt. Mason, taking a hasty backward look, saw that the mob was gaining. They had passed the grating now and were less than fifty yards behind him with a uniformed policeman and the Legattrick bodyguard in the lead.

Even as Mason looked the policeman fired again. A hot iron seared the muscles of Mason's left arm and blood crept down to his wrist.

With nothing with which to wipe the blood away, he could only rush panting along, licking his arm as he ran. The corner came nearer—the mob came nearer, too. He was within ten yards of the busy main road when two policemen came running in from the other end. Leaping aside to avoid them, Mason gathered his muscles for the final effort which would carry him into obscurity and leave his pursuers foiled.

The policeman behind yelled something unintelligible, fired and cut a long red flake of brick from the wall at Mason's side.

Both of the policemen in front looked startled, snatched their guns and gestured toward Mason.

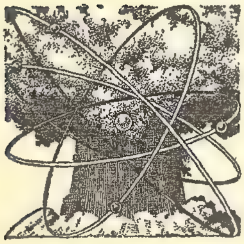
"*Halt*, you!" they shouted.

Desperately Mason dived for the gap between the opposing officers and the wall. Guns flamed on one side and from behind. Pain, red-hot, speared through him, stabbing his lungs. The force of the blows spun him around and, as he whirled, he knew that he was performing the pirouette of death.

He tottered off the sidewalk, bloody hands clasped to his abdomen, his shocked mind vaguely wondering how he, the unseen, could have been seen. How had anyone been able to aim at an invisible man? For two seconds he stood with glazing eyes turned toward the sun. Then, abruptly, he collapsed into the embrace of his own shadow—his treacherous shadow, which had been visible to others even though he himself was invisible!

●

An Ominous Tale from Bikini



PROOF of genetic mutation via the atomic bomb has been reported recently by scientists working on Bikini plant specimens at Texas A. & M. College and State College of Washington. Working with wheat, barley and cotton seeds they have an ominous story to tell.

According to Dr. Meta S. Brown, of the Texas College, cotton grown from seeds irradiated in the experimental Bikini blasts, reveals definite irregularities in the vital pairing of its chromosomes. And Dr. Luther Smith of Washington narrates similar facts about barley, wheat and oats seeds from the famous atoll.

According to Dr. Smith, "It has been repeatedly demonstrated that translocations and other structural changes in chromosomes have an adverse effect on the fertility of animals and plants."

It is generally felt that the above experiments, as well as the threatening world political situation, were a basic reason for the U. S. Government's recent publication of THE EFFECTS OF ATOMIC WEAPONS. The ultimate effects on human genetics caused by the Hiroshima and Nagasaki blasts will be long in coming—but they may be startling and tragic.—*Matt Lee*

The AMAZING PLANET

a novelet by

CLARK ASHTON SMITH

Captain Volmar and Roverton of the spaceship "Alcyone" fall captive to the weird dwarf beings of a baffling globe!

CHAPTER I

Another New World

CAPTAIN VOLMAR was seated at his desk in the navigating room of the Spaceship *Alcyone*. Upon the desk before him lay the notes which he had jotted down regarding the strange planet the spaceship was now rapidly approaching. Around Volmar were grouped the members of the Scientific Council of this Exploratory Expedition into Outer Space.

"This world," said Volmar, "plainly is of Mercurian type. One side is always presented to the sun; the other confronts eternal night, though it may be that there is a very slow and incomplete diurnal rotation. One hemisphere, as we have seen, is a blazing desert, and the other is sheeted with ice and frozen snow, except for the twilight zone in which we have landed."

After eight unbroken months of

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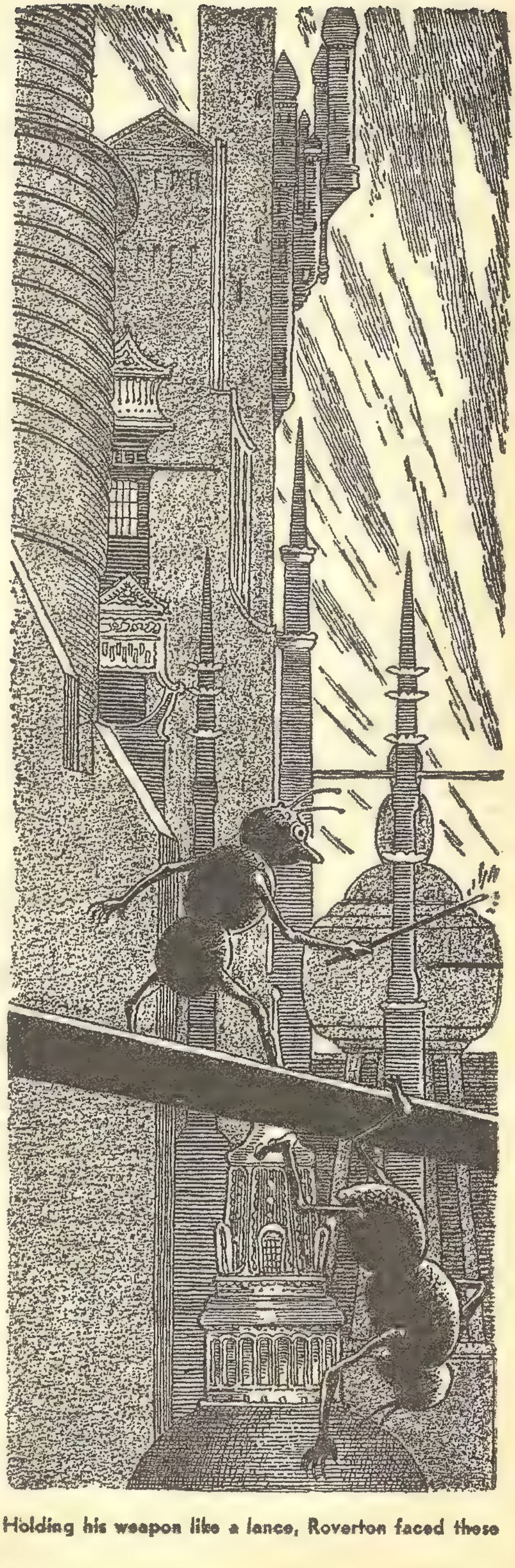

Holding his weapon like a lance, Roverton faced these

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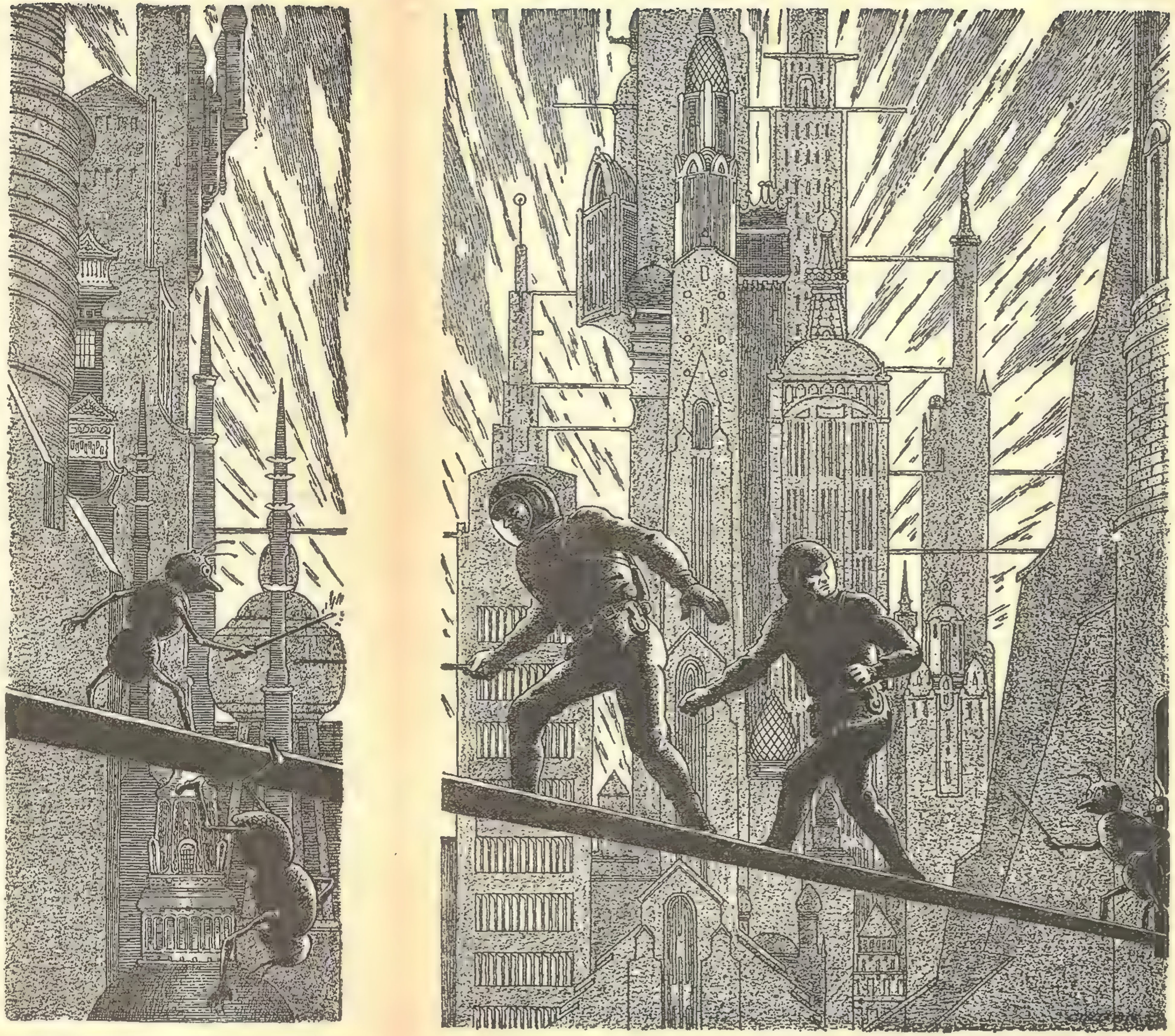
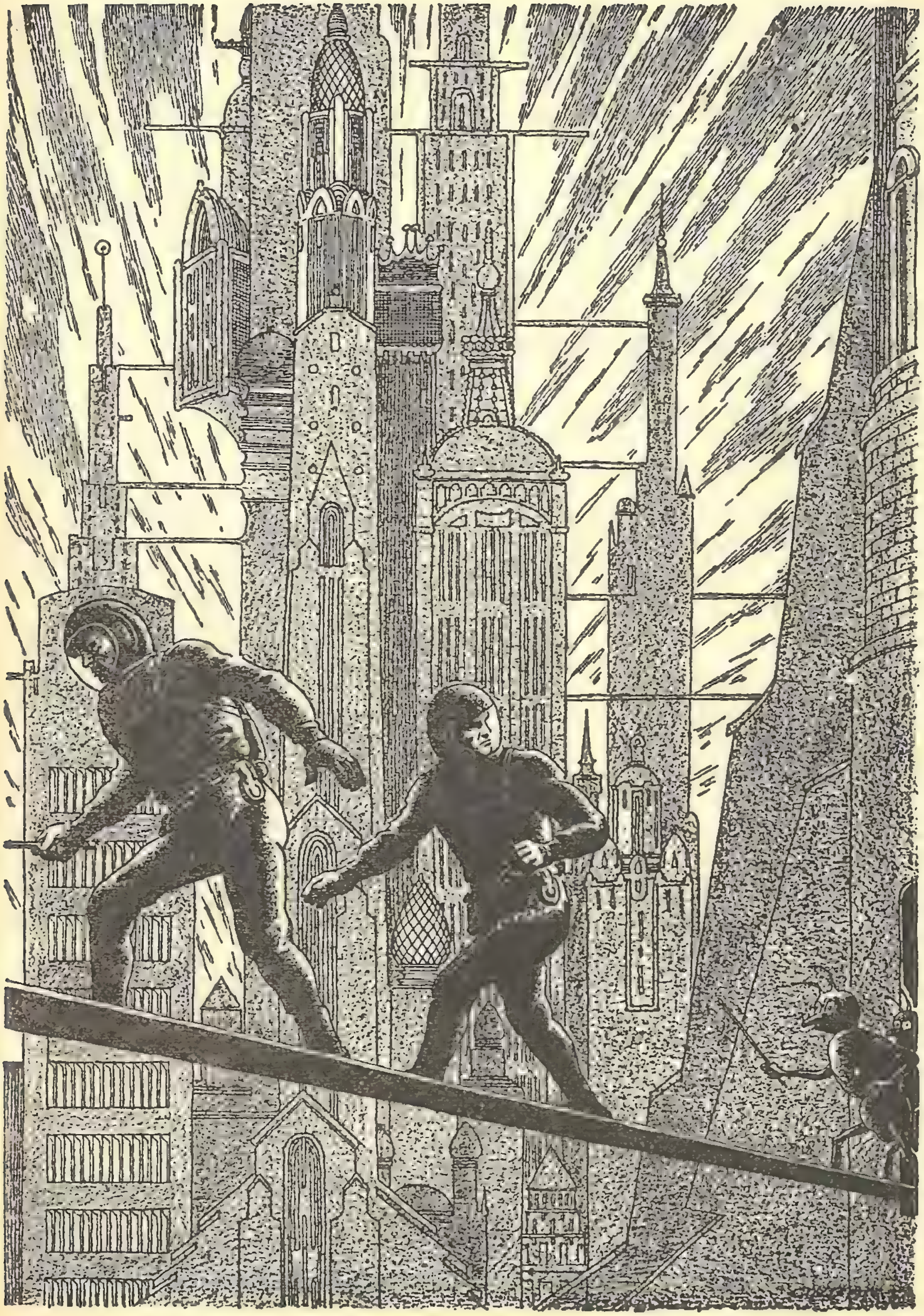


Holding his weapon like a lance, Roverton faced these creatures in combat, striking and parrying with lightning agility



creatures in combat, striking and parrying with lightning agility ether-voyaging, in their attempted circuit of the universe, Captain Volmar and his men had felt the need of stretching their legs again on some sort of Terra Firma. The cramped quarters of the ether-ship *Alcyone*, the monotony of a never-ceasing flight through spatial emptiness and darkness, with only far-strewn suns and systems and nebulae for mile-posts, had palled on everyone, even the ascetically ardent Volmar. A brief respite on some planetary body was deemed advisable.

They had made a number of such pauses during their half-decade of journeying.

They were nearing a lesser, unnamed sun in Serpens when this decision was made. Of course, the sun might not possess a planetary system. However, as they drew closer, the *Alcyone's* telescopic reflectors revealed four planets that were circling it in wide-flung orbits. It so happened that in the position which it then occupied, the innermost world was nearer to the spaceship than the others; and it soon attracted the curiosity of the voyagers by its odd markings.

Between the deserts of the sunlit hemisphere and the ice-fields and mountains that glimmered palely on the nightward side beneath two diminutive moons, a dark, narrow zone suggesting vegetation was visible—a zone that encircled the planet from pole to pole. Clouds and vapors above this penumbral belt had proved the presence of an atmosphere. A landing was made; and Captain Volmar, Jasper the mate, Roverton, and the other members of the crew emerged cautiously from the flier's man-hole after determining the temperature and chemical constituents of the outside air.

THE temperature was moderate—about 60°. But the existence of one or two unknown, uncertain gases in the air had denoted the advisability of wearing masks and carrying oxygen-tanks. Equipped with these, and armed with automatics, the party sallied forth into a strange landscape.

The *Alcyone* had descended on a low, level, open hill-top. The ground resembled a coarse turf, and was pale-blue in color. When the men trod upon it for the first time, they found that it was not covered with anything in the least related to grass, but with a peculiar growth, two or three inches high, like a thin, branching fungus. It was not rooted in the soil; and it fell over or crumpled readily beneath the footsteps of the explorers.

They could see plainly enough in the weird twilight, strengthened as it was by the glimmering of the two moons, one of which was crescent and the other gibbous. Far-off, a row of mound-like hills, interspersed with sharp dolomites, was outlined on an afterglow of torrid saffron that soared in deepening rays to assail the green heavens. A few stars, and the other planets of the system were visible.

Volmar and his men approached the edge of the hill-top. Below them, a long, undulant slope descended to a plain covered with the dark vegetation which they had descried from afar in space.

It was a mass of purples and blues and mauves, ranging from the palest to the darkest tints, and it seemed to vary in height from shrublike growths to things that presented the size, if not the natural aspect, of full-grown forest trees. Some of the smaller forms, like an advance guard, had climbed mid-way on the acclivity. They were very heavy at the base, with dwindling boles like inverted carrots and many nodular outbranchings of an irregularity more grotesque than that of any terrene cacti. The lower branches appeared to touch the ground, with the ungainly sprawl of crab or tarantula legs.

"I'd like to have a look at those things," said Volmar. "Do you want to come with me, Roverton? The rest of you fellows had best remain within sight of the flier. We haven't seen any sort of animate life yet; but there's no telling what might be lurking in the neighborhood."

He and Roverton went down the slope, with the fungoid turf crunching beneath their feet.

Presently they came to some old footmarks, characterized by three toes of preternatural length and sharpness. The prints were very far apart, suggesting that their originator was possessed of phenomenally long legs.

Volmar and Roverton followed the tracks, insomuch as these appeared to be going in the general direction of the space-flier. But a little further on, in the lee of a dense clump of vegetation, the tracks entered a huge burrow, into which the men could almost have walked without stooping, on a gentle incline. Both eyed it rather warily as they passed; but there was no visible sign of its occupant.

"I'm not sure that I'd care to meet that customer, whatever it is," observed Roverton. "Probably it's some loathsome overgrown insect."

They had gone perhaps seventy feet beyond the burrow's entrance, when the ground suddenly caved in beneath Volmar, who was in the lead and he disappeared from Roverton's sight. Hastening to the edge of the hole into which his companion had fallen, Roverton met a similar fate, for the ground crumbled beneath him and he was precipitated into a dark pit that was seven or eight feet deep, landing beside Volmar.

Both were a little bruised by the fall but were otherwise unhurt. They had broken through into the burrow, whose entrance they could now see from where they were lying. The place was filled with a noisome, mephitic smell, and was damp with disagreeable oozings. Picking themselves up, the men started toward the entrance at once, hoping that the burrow's owner had not been aroused by their involuntary intrusion.

AS they approached the mouth, they were startled by a medley of shrill, piping sounds which arose from without—the first sounds they had heard in this fantastic world. As they drew still nearer, they saw the silhouettes of two figures that were standing just outside the cave. The figures were bipedal, with thick legs of disproportionate shortness, and arms that reached almost to the ground. The heads could not be seen within the tunnel. These extraordinary beings were stretching a narrow, heavy-stranded net, weighted at the ends with balls of metal or mineral, which they held between them across the entrance. They continued their piping noise; and their voices grew shriller still and took on an odd, cajoling note.

Volmar and Roverton had paused.

"Now what?" whispered Roverton.

"I think," Volmar whispered in reply, "that those creatures, whoever or whatever they are, must be waiting for the owner of the burrow to come out. They have tracked it, or perhaps have even driven it here. Probably they're planning to wind that net around its long legs when it emerges."

"Or," suggested Roverton, "maybe they saw us fall into the pit and are planning to take us captive."

SEVERAL more of the weird hunters, armed with trident-headed lances, were grouped around the opening.

The heads of these beings were even more peculiar than their limbs, and were quite hideous from a human standpoint. They possessed three eyes, two of which were set obliquely in close juxtaposition to a slit-like mouth surrounded with waving or drooping tentacles, and the other near the top of a long, sloping brow that was lined with sparse bristles. There were rudimentary projections from each jowl, that might have been either ears or wattles; but nothing even remotely suggestive of nostrils was detectible. The whole expression was supremely wild and ferocious.

"Can't say that I admire the looks of those customers," murmured Roverton. "Plainly they're a hunting-party; and we, or the occupant of this burrow—or both—have been marked out as their meat."

The guards at the entrance had continued their piping song. Suddenly it seemed to find a far-off echo in the depths of the cavern. The sound approached and grew louder and shriller. Volmar and Roverton could see the gleaming of two greenish phosphorescent eyes in the darkness beyond the circle of dim light that fell from the caved-in roof.

"The hunters are luring that beast," said Volmar, "by imitating the voices of its own kind."

He and Roverton, with their automatics ready, watched the phosphoric eyes that continued to advance from the gloom.

Now they could see two enormous, spraddling, many-jointed legs, and a squat shaggy face and globe-like body; and then the two hind-legs, as the creature came into the light. Somehow, it was more like an insect than an animal. As the monster passed beneath the opening, the two men saw the flash of a spear cast by one of the watchers above. It sank into the dark, hairy body, and the piping rose to a harsh scream, as the creature leapt forward upon Volmar and Roverton.

With their automatics flaming and crackling in the gloom, the men turned and ran toward the entrance. Their maddened pursuer seemingly undeterred by the bullets, was close upon their heels.

The weighted net was still stretched across the burrow's mouth, and Volmar and Roverton now fired their last cartridges at the legs of the two beings who held it. Both of these creatures fell sprawling and dropped the net. The men burst forth into the light, only to find themselves confronted by a dozen similar beings, all armed with nets or spears. These bizarre hunters gave no evidence of fear or surprise at the appearance of the earthlings, but proceeded with calm, methodical swiftness to form in a ring.

The men rushed upon them, hoping to break through, but with ineludible speed and deftness each was entangled in the heavy meshes cast about him, and went to the ground with pinioned arms and legs. Their automatics had fallen from their fingers and were beyond reach. Lying helpless, they saw the emerging of the monster that had driven them from the burrow. It was neatly trapped in its turn by the guards; and it lay palpitating on the ground, bleeding a thick bluish fluid from the spear and bullet wounds it had received.

CHAPTER II

The Dwarfs

THE two men could scarcely move, so closely were the weighted meshes wound about them. "This is a pretty tight situation," remarked Roverton, whose wit was unquenchable by any hardship or danger, no matter how desperate.

"Yes, and it may be tighter before we are through," added Volmar grimly, as he lay staring up into the strange faces of their captors, who had gathered in a circle about the earthmen and were surveying them with manifest curiosity.

The hunters began to gibber among themselves, in guttural growling voices that were evidently their natural tones, and were quite unlike the shrill pipings with which they had lured the monster from its burrow. Their speech seemed to consist of monosyllabic sounds whose exact phonetic nature would have defied human imitation or classification.

After what was plainly a sort of debate two of the giants stepped forward and proceeded to unbind the legs of the earth-men, leaving their arms tied by the knotted nets, and prodded them roughly with spear-butts to make them stand up.

Volmar and Roverton scarcely needed this urging. They rose awkwardly and stiffly. Then, bearing them along in its midst, the whole party started off through the woods in an opposite direction from the hill on which the flier had landed. Some of the hunters had tied the trussed monster to a sort of light metal frame with handles and were carrying it among them. The two who had been wounded by the earth-men limped along in the rear. Short-legged as they were, these beings made rapid progress, and Volmar and Roverton were soon compelled to quicken their pace.

"Now whither?" asked Roverton. "I suppose you and I are going into the tribal pot along with that monster."

Volmar did not answer. He was examining the net by which his arms were bound. It was made of a finely linked metal, like highly tempered copper, and was very strong. The workmanship was so delicate and regular as to arouse wonderment. Also, the spears carried by the giants were exquisitely wrought.

"I wonder," soliloquized Volmar, "if these nets and weapons were made by their owners?"

"Probably," said Roverton. "Of course, the work seems to betoken a considerable degree of manual skill and civilization; and these beings are a pretty low and bestial-looking lot from a human esthetic view-point. But after all we can't tell much about them from their appearance. All the extraplanetary peoples we have met were more or less monstrous according to our standards."

"That's true," assented Volmar slowly. "But somehow I have a hunch that our captors aren't the only beings on this world."

"Maybe; but I'm not very curious to know. I hope Jasper and the others will follow our trail—they must be worrying about us by now. A little rescue party would certainly be welcome."

Several miles were traversed by the party. The way led deviously over a flat plain, amid clumps of the rootless vegetation. The row of mound-like hills and sharp dolomites which the men had seen from the *Alcyone's* landing-place was now very near.

NOW the path began to slope downward. Soon the party emerged in an amphitheater surrounded by crags and pinnacles. Here an unexpected sight awaited the earth-men. To one side, in the lee of a cliff, were a number of rude stone huts; and in the middle of the amphitheater there reposed a huge, glittering object, perfectly oval in form, and plainly of an artificial nature.

"I'll wager," cried Roverton, "that that thing is some kind of air-vessel, or even space-craft."

"I never bet," rejoined Volmar. "But I shouldn't be surprised if you were right."

Many figures were moving about the oval object; and as the party drew nearer, it could be seen that they were not all of the same type of species. Many were like the hunters who had captured Volmar and Roverton; but others differed as widely from these as the hunters differed in their turn from the earth-men.

They were about four feet tall, with spindling limbs and delicate bodies, pinched in the center like those of ants, and heads of such disproportionate size as to give at once the impression of artificial masks. These creatures were gorgeously colored, with all the hues of the harlequin opal, and contrasted extremely with the dark giants.

Seen closer at hand, the oval object revealed a series of small ports filled with a vitreous, violet-hued material, and an open circular door in its side from which a stair-case of light aerial structure, doubtless collapsible, ran to the ground.

The two groups of unearthly beings were engaged in a lively conversation, and the gruff gutturals of the giants were surmounted by the sweet, piercing sibilants of the dwarfs. Several strange animals of varying size and monstrosity, bound with nets, were lying on the ground at one side; and some of the dwarfs were bringing copper-colored nets and spears and other weapons or implements of more doubtful use from the interior of the oval vessel. When some of these articles were handed over to the giants, the earth-men surmised that they were being bartered in exchange for the trussed animals.

"What did I tell you?" cried Volmar. "I knew that those nets and tridents weren't made by our captors. And I doubt very much if the dwarfs are natives of this planet at all. I believe they have come from a neighboring world of this same solar system. Possibly they are zoologists, and are collecting specimens of the local fauna. I think those head-pieces of theirs are respirative masks—they don't seem to fit with the rest of their anatomy. No doubt they are unable to breathe the atmosphere of this world, at least in its pure state; and it is probable that those masks include some sort of filtering apparatus. There is nothing to be discerned in the nature of air-tanks."

Seeing the approach of the hunters with Volmar and Roverton in their midst, the two groups interrupted their bargaining and stared in silence at the new-comers. The heads, or masks, of the dwarfs were fitted with two pairs of green eyes, set vertically and far apart; and their gaze was uncannily intent and wholly unchanging. The eyes were divided into many facets, like those of an insect, and blazed with emerald light.

Between and below the eyes there was a short, trumpet-like attachment, which doubtless served as a mouthpiece; and its hollow tube might well have contained the filtering apparatus surmised by Volmar. Two curving horns perforated like flutes, arose from the sides of those curious heads, and suggested an auditory mechanism. The limbs and torsos of the dwarfs were seemingly nude, and glittered like the shards of bright-colored beetles, with nacreous lights that ran and melted into each other with every movement.

A BRIEF interval of silence, as if all these beings were overcome with amazement at the appearance of Volmar and Roverton; and then the dwarfs began to talk and gesticulate excitedly among themselves, pointing at the earth-men with their thin, pipe-like arms.

"I'll bet," said Roverton, "that they think we're some new species of animal native to this world, and are trying to classify us."

"Guess they're trying to drive a bargain for us," conjectured Roverton. "And the hunters want full value in trade before they part with such rare specimens."

A little later, to confirm this surmise, the dwarfs brought out a pile of odd but exquisitely wrought implements, some of which were perhaps designed for culinary use, and several large bell-shaped receptacles of semi-vitreous earthenware filled with varicolored materials that resembled roughly-ground farinaceous food-stuffs.

These were laid before the hunters, who continued to demur and chaffer; and then some huge, abdominous bottles, made of an unidentifiable substance that was neither glass nor metal nor porcelain, were brought forth and added to the pile. Their contents were past the conjecture of the earth-men, but obviously they were prized by the giants and were considered as clinching the bargain.

The chaffering came to an end, and attention was turned to the mounded monster which the giants had captured with Volmar and Roverton. The dwarfs appeared to be rather dubious about purchasing this creature, and examined its wounds in a somewhat cursory manner. Their decision was plainly negative; for after a little while the captors of the earth-men, as well as the other group of giants, broke up and went away in the direction of the stone huts, bearing the various articles of barter and the dying animal as well as several other curious creatures which the dwarfs for one reason or another had declined to buy.

"Sold!" said Roverton, smiling ruefully as he peered at the unique menagerie of which he and Volmar were seemingly a part. There were at least a dozen of these quaint monsters, who represented the fauna of the planet. Some were undreamable mixtures of serpentine, insect and mammalian forms, others were loathsome, enormous annalids, and others still were not alliable with any known genus or combination of genera. Many were plainly ferocious and were still struggling convulsively against their bonds. Anyone who came within reach of their dart-like talons or saw-like teeth would have fared badly.

"I wonder how the dwarfs are going to handle them?" questioned Volmar, as he eyed the contrast between these monsters, many of which were quite huge and bulky, and the frail iridescent beings.

As if an answer to his query, a tackle of strong metallic-looking ropes was lowered from the door of the vessel. Then two dwarfs, armed with long rods of a dull bluish material terminating in circular disks covered with blunt prongs of some brighter substance, came forward from amid the group. Each applied the end of his rod to the spine of one of the struggling animals.

Instantly, with a single shudder, the monsters lay still, as if dead. Manifestly some paralyzing force was emitted by the rods. The lowered ropes were then fastened about the inert monsters by other dwarfs, and they were hauled up by a sort of mechanical windlass and disappeared within the oval vessel. Two more were treated in the same manner; and then the rod-bearers approached Volmar and Roverton.

"Hell! they're going to lay us out too," cried Roverton. He and Volmar looked about at the dwarfs, who surrounded them in a circle. Many of these frail beings were armed with the strange rods or with other instruments of dubious nature.

"Let's make a break for it," said Volmar. He and Roverton leapt back from the advancing rod-bearers, and hurled themselves at the circle. The dwarfs gave way, avoiding them with agility; and one of them reached out with his rod and touched Volmar on the chest while another caught Roverton in the abdomen.

Neither was aware of any shock from the contact; the effect was more that of some narcotic or anaesthetic, pervading the entire body with instant numbness and insensibility. Darkness seemed to rush upon them from all sides, and both men became totally unconscious.

CHAPTER III

A Desperate Situation

EMERGING from the bournless midnight of oblivion, Roverton heard a deep thrumming sound which conveyed at once to his reviving brain the idea of some powerful mechanism. The sound was incessant and appeared to come from above. Roverton could feel its vibration in all the tissues of his body.

Opening his eyes, he received a series of visual impressions which for the moment were altogether confusing and were quite meaningless. There was a bright chaos of lights, of unearthly forms and angles, which baffled his brain. Then his eyes began to establish a sort of order, and he realized that he was lying on the floor of an unfamiliar structure, made of transparent panes in a frame-work of massive metal bars. The structure was perhaps seven feet in height by nine in diameter, and was shaped like a huge box or cage.

Volmar, still unconscious, was lying beside him; and both Volmar and himself were no longer bound by the copperish nets. Between the bars he could see other structures of a similar type in which the monsters trapped by the giant hunters and sold to the dwarfs were reposing.

Some of these creatures were beginning to recover from their paralysis, while others were still insensible and immobile. The cages were in a long room with curving walls and a low, arched ceiling. There were numerous ports in the walls, which gave a rich purple light through their stained transparency.

Roverton was still bewildered as he studied these details. Then, as remembrance returned, he understood. He and Volmar were on board the oval vessel; and the deep thrumming sound was the noise of its engines. If, as he had surmised, the vessel was an ether-ship, they were now in the midst of interplanetary space on their way to some unknown world!

Stunned and overwhelmed by the situation, he turned again to Volmar, and saw that the captain was beginning to revive. His eyes opened, his fingers stirred; and then he lifted his right arm, rather feebly A moment more, and he spoke.

"Where are we, Roverton?"

"I don't know, exactly. But we're all boxed up and ready for delivery to the zoo, wherever it is. And I think we are now in mid-space. In all likelihood the planet to which we are being taken is one that belongs to this same system. There are four worlds, as you will remember, and there's no telling which one is our destination. Our chances of ever seeing the *Alcyone* again are none too gaudy under the circumstances. What a prospect!"

"The situation is very bad," said Volmar. "Apart from our ignorance as to where we are being taken, and the impossibility of escape or rescue, we shall soon have the problems of air and food to cope with—problems for which there is no solution as far as I can see.

"Our air-masks and tanks have not been tampered with; and we had a twelve hours' supply of compressed air when we left the *Alcyone*. But since we do not know how long we have been unconscious, we cannot compute how much of the supply still remains; and in any case asphyxiation is highly probable at no remote time."

Roverton had been inspecting the cage with careful attention. He noticed a curving metal tube which entered it through the floor at one end. Putting his hand over the mouth of the tube, he felt an air-current.

"I think," he remarked, "that our cage, and doubtless the others, are being supplied with some sort of compressed air—probably the atmosphere of the Mercurian world on which we were captured. No doubt the air in the room itself is that of the world to which the dwarfs are native, and is not respirable by these monsters."

THE room had been untenanted, save for the earth-men and their fellow-captives. Now Volmar and Roverton saw that five of the opalescent dwarfs had suddenly appeared, carrying receptacles of exotic forms, some of which were filled with liquids and others with objects resembling truffles and tubers. The dwarfs proceeded to open a panel worked by some hidden spring in the side of each cage and then introduced into each a vessel filled with fluid and one filled with the unknown food-stuffs. This was done very quickly and cautiously, and a mechanical arm-like apparatus was used in the actual transmission of the vessels. Afterwards the panels were closed immediately.

When all the cages had been supplied in this manner, the dwarfs stood watching their occupants, who in most cases were greedily absorbing the food and water. The earth-men perceived that the dwarfs were now without their masks, revealing a physiognomy with elaborate eyes, proboscides and antennae, such as might well be looked for in connection with their delicate bodies.

When they noticed that Volmar and Roverton made no effort to touch the provender, the five dwarfs gathered about their cage, eyeing them curiously and carrying on an eager discussion or disputation.

"I'm hungry and thirsty enough," confided Roverton to the Captain. "But how is one to eat and drink through a respirative mask—even granting that that stuff is fit for human consumption? However, I suppose the dwarfs think the masks are part of our anatomy, along with the suits and tanks. They must be pretty dumb not to realize that we are intelligent beings, who make use of artificial contrivances even as they themselves."

"Literal-mindedness isn't confined to human beings, I suspect," said Volmar.

"These fellows are evidently taking us at our face value. They found us on the Mercurian world, along with the zoological specimens they were collecting; and doubtless it never occurred to them that we might have come there in a space-ship, like themselves."

Presently the dwarfs departed; and time wore on. Overcome by their strange and perilous situation, the earth-men talked in a desultory manner, and lapsed into lengthening intervals of silence.

They were consumed by growing thirst and hunger. They began to eye the water and food-stuffs avidly.

"What do you say we try it?" Roverton suggested.

"Go ahead. If you survive, I'll experiment myself. But be careful."

Roverton unfastened his helmet and removed it very cautiously. He took a deep breath. The air in the cage was heavy, with a queer smell that stung his nostrils and smarted in his lungs. It was breathable enough, as far as he could tell, though its cumulative effect on the human respiratory mechanism was an uncertain quantity.

He raised the deep vessel containing the water to his lips, and sipped it. The fluid was semi-opaque and flavorless. Then, gingerly, he picked up one of the tubers, which was about the size and shape of a large potato, and bit into it. The thing was tough-skinned, with a porous, fungoid-looking interior, and its taste was unpleasantly bitter. Roverton made a wry face, as he swallowed a scanty mouthful.

"Can't say that I care for the grub." He returned to the water and sipped a little more of it while Captain Volmar proceeded to remove his own mask. Roverton then passed him the water and Volmar drank some of it cautiously and afterwards sampled one of the tubers but rejected it summarily without swallowing any of the unpalatable substance.

"I'm dubious of that stuff," he observed. "As you know, lots of things which are perfectly good foods for ultra-terrestrial life-forms are sheer poison for us. I hope you didn't swallow much of it."

"Only a little," rejoined Roverton. "And maybe the stuff is poisonous—I don't believe I feel so very well." A sudden sickness had come upon him, with vertigo and violent internal pains and he sat down on the floor of the cage.

Volmar began to feel a little sick himself; and since he had not eaten any of the tuber, he concluded that the unfamiliar water, and perhaps the air, were contributing to this condition. However, he did not develop the agonizing pains, fever and delirium which progressively characterized Roverton's case. Writhing convulsively, moaning, and out of his head half the time, Roverton lay on the floor while Volmar watched beside him, totally unable, for lack of medicinal remedies or even precise knowledge, to do anything that would palliate his sufferings.

AN hour or two passed in this manner without bringing any marked change in the sick man's condition. Absorbed in his vigil, Volmar did not perceive the approach of two dwarfs who had entered the room, till he heard the excited babble of their shrill voices. They were standing beside the cage and were gesticulating with much animation as they peered at himself and Roverton.

Volmar was puzzled by their excitement, till he remembered that he and Roverton were now without their masks and that the dwarfs had never seen them before in such disattire. Evidently the discovery that the masks were artificial and removable had provoked much interest.

After a minute or so the dwarfs hastened from the room, and soon returned in company with half a dozen others, who surrounded the cage and peered at the earth-men with their bulging, many-angled orbs. Much debate was going on among them; but Volmar was too deeply worried about his comrade's condition to give more than a perfunctory attention to their gestures and crowding faces Also he was beginning to feel a little light-headed, probably from some element in the air that was ill-suited to human respiration. His brain attached no significance to the re-departure of one of the dwarfs; even when this being came back a minute later, bearing two of the strange anaesthetic rods, Volmar remembered with apathetic slowness and indifference the former use which had been made of these instruments.

Very quickly and cautiously, one of the dwarfs opened a panel in the cage. Two others, standing in readiness with the rods, thrust their weapons with equal quickness through the opening and applied them to the two men. Instantly, as before, Volmar fell senseless; and the sick, delirious Roverton ceased to moan and mutter and lapsed into merciful oblivion.

CHAPTER IV

The Amazing Planet

SIMULTANEOUSLY the men awakened from their second plunge into this mysterious anaesthesia. The circumstances under which they found themselves were even more baffling and more incredible than their confused senses could at first comprehend.

It was evident at once that they were no longer on the ether-ship, for the room in which they were lying was very spacious and was walled and roofed and floored with an alabaster-like stone of great luster and beauty. There were many open windows, of an oval form, through which bewildering glimpses of an intricate alien architecture were visible against a glaring violet sky. The impression conveyed was that they were in an upper story of some lofty edifice. The air was pervaded by a tropic warmth.

They were lying on a broad couch, covered with a flossy, mottled material of red and saffron, and inclined at an angle of perhaps fifteen degrees. The room was furnished with several small tables, supported on frail, spidery legs and littered with outlandish implements and quaintly shaped vials such as the surgeons or chemists of an unknown world might employ. Except for Volmar and Roverton, the room was seemingly untenanted.

More curious even than their surroundings, however, were the sensations of the two men. Contrary to all natural expectation, there was no least trace of illness, hunger, thirst or fatigue on the part of either. Also, with a feeling that amounted to stupefaction, both realized that they were breathing a pure, well-oxygenated air—and that they were wearing their masks, which must have been replaced during their period of unconsciousness.

It seemed as if the air-supply in the tanks must in some unaccountable manner have been renewed by their captors. Both men were conscious of a singular buoyance, a remarkable alertness and bodily well-being.

"Are you all right?" asked Volmar, as he sat up on the couch and turned to Roverton.

"Never felt better in my life. But I can't understand why I should feel that way. The last I can remember is being deadly sick in that infernal menagerie cage. And where are we, anyway? It certainly looks as if we had arrived somewhere."

"I judge," answered Volmar, "that we are on the particular planetary body to which our captors belong. Plainly, they found us with our masks off, they realized that we were intelligent beings like themselves, and not mere monsters; and they have been treating us since with more consideration. They must have analyzed the remaining air in our tanks, and then replenished it with a synthetic substitute of their own. What else they've done to us I don't know. But probably we'll find out before long."

"Speaking for myself," said Roverton, "I feel as if I had been well-dined and wined, and had received a shot in the arm to boot. They must have found some way to feed us while we were unconscious—and something non-poisonous and assimilable by the human organism to feed us with."

Before Volmar could reply, he and Roverton saw that three dwarfs were standing beside them. These beings were taller, with more authoritative bearing, with more delicate antennae and proboscides than the ones they had seen on the space-vessel; and their coloration took a deep red and orange and purple. With queer, jerky genuflections, like nodding insects, they addressed the men. Their words were scarcely articulate to human ears; but an idea of formal courtesy and obeisance was somehow conveyed.

Volmar and Roverton, rising to their feet, returned the valediction in the best manner they could muster.

Plucking the sleeves of the men's clothing with their antennal fingers, with elaborate gestures whose meaning was obvious, the dwarfs led the way through an odd, elliptical door that had been concealed from sight in an angle of the wall. Thence, at the end of a short passage, the party emerged on a sort of balcony.

THE earth-men gave an involuntary gasp of amazement and were seized by an instant dizziness as they approached the verge; for the balcony was merely a scant ledge without walls, railing or hand-holds of any kind; and below, at an awful depth, were the streets of a monstrous city. It was like looking down from a precipice into some alpine chasm.

All around and above there soared other buildings of the same white material and the same bizarre structure as the one on whose balcony the earth-men were standing. These edifices were of colossal extent and many of them culminated in airy spires and pinnacles of a fairy delicacy, thronging the bright purple heavens like a host of shining obelisks.

At frequently recurring intervals, the buildings were connected by bridges of a gossamer thinness and fragility, which formed a gleaming web-work in the air. They were wrought of that pale, alabastrine substance; and one of them issued, without sign of jointure, from the narrow ledge at the earth-men's feet, and ran to the midway story of a titan pile that was more than fifty yards distant.

Far down in the abysmal streets, and on the lofty bridges, the frail people of the city passed like iridescent motes.

Spellbound by the vision, and dazed by its vistas, Volmar and Roverton became slowly aware that one of their guides had stepped from the balcony to the bridge and was signing them to follow.

"Holy smoke!" was Roverton's exclamation. "Are we supposed to walk on that?"

The railless bridge was barely a yard in width and the drop to the street below was terrific—at least a full half-mile. The guide, however, seemed to possess the equilibrium of a bird or an insect. His two companions were standing behind the earth-men, and were armed with weapons like double-pointed goads. As Volmar and Roverton hesitated, these beings came forward, lifting the formidable points in a gesture of menace.

"Well," said Volmar, "I guess we'd better move along. After all, the bridge isn't quite so bad as a tight-rope."

The earth-men followed their guide, who was tripping lightly and unconcernedly before them. Accustomed as they were to cosmic elevations, they did not care to peer downward at the awful gulfs on either hand, but kept their eyes on the balcony ahead. With short and careful paces, they managed to cross the long, attenuated span.

Looking back from their new vantage, they saw that the building they had left was much lower than those around it, and possessed a flat, towerless roof. Several glittering vessels, similar to the one in which they had traveled through space from the Mercurian world, were lying on the edge of this roof, which was plainly a landing-stage for such craft. Beyond, were rows of high towers, some of which were inclined at oblique angles and were interconnected in the same fashion as the main structures.

They were now conducted into the

heart of the edifice in which that precarious bridge had ended. Through labyrinthine corridors, they were led into a building which appeared to be a sort of scientific laboratory. The earthlings and their guides entered a vast room, filled with transparent cages, most of which were occupied by fearsome and variegated monsters. Among these, the men recognized certain of their former companions in captivity. Some of the creatures had been rendered unconscious; and dwarfs wearing atmospheric masks had entered their cages and by means of little suction-pumps attached to crystalline vials were extracting various amounts of the life-fluids, or perhaps of certain special glandular secretions, from the motionless monsters.

SOMEWHAT sickened, Volmar and Roverton watched the flowing of diverse-colored fluids into the vials as they went by.

"So that's the game," was Roverton's comment. "But I wonder what they use the stuff for."

"There's no telling. Those fluids may provide valuable serums for aught we know; or they may be used in the compounding of drugs, or even be employed as food."

Passing between endless rows of cages, they were thrust into a small room whose door was then closed with a gong-like clang. The room was occupied by four dwarfs who wore atmospheric masks, and was filled with mysterious implements that were sinister as those of a torture chamber.

Here the men were directed to remove their suits and helmets. They obeyed, realizing that the air in the shut room was the same that they had been breathing from their tanks. Evidently it had been prepared for their reception.

Neither could remember fully afterwards the complicated and peculiar tests through which they were put during the next hour. Ill and confused and faint, they were dimly conscious of multiform instruments that were applied to their bodies, of changing lights that blinded them, of the purring and clicking of coiled mechanism, and the high sibilant voices of their examiners conferring together.

Toward the end, through clouds of numbness and confusion, they felt a stinging sensation in their chests, and each sensed vaguely that an incision had been made in his flesh with a tiny tusk-like knife and that suction-pumps of the same type as those employed in drawing animal fluids from the caged monsters were being applied to these incisions.

Dully they watched the blood that was drawn slowly through thin black elastic tubes into squat-bellied bottles.

Both were on the point of virtual collapse from their increasing *malaise.* They scarcely noticed when the tubes were withdrawn and the filled bottles corked and laid carefully aside. Nor did they perceive the subsequent action of their examiners till there came a sharp prickling in their shoulders. Almost immediately their senses cleared, and they saw that a light-green fluid was being injected into their veins by transparent hypodermics with double needles curved like serpents' teeth.

The fluid must have been a powerful drug, for every sign of illness or even nervousness disappeared within a minute or two after its administration. Both men felt the same sense of well-being, of mental alertness and physical fitness and buoyancy, with which they had awakened from their last period of unconsciousness. They surmised that they were not experiencing the effects of the drug for the first time.

"Well," remarked Roverton, "that dope is what you might call an all-round panacea. The stuff seems to take the place of food, drink and medicine."

"It's a pretty fair tonic," agreed Captain Volmar. "But watch out for a possible hang-over."

Now with returning normality, they observed the vials of drawn blood; and the memory of what had happened came back to them with a potentiality of significance.

"I hope," said Roverton, "that these people will be satisfied before they reach the dissection stage. Apparently they mean to learn all they can about us. Personally, I have an intuition that there is something pretty horrible behind all this."

CHAPTER V

Revolt!

APPARENTLY the examination was over. The men were signaled to resume their clothing and helmets. Then the door was opened, and they were permitted to emerge. Their examiners followed, bringing the vials of blood, and removing the masks which had been worn for protection in that specially prepared atmosphere. They led Volmar and Roverton down a hall.

Their destination proved to be a circular apartment. Here a dozen dwarfs were gathered, as if to await the earthmen and their conductors. Two of them however, appeared to represent a cruder and more primitive race of the same species, with duller coloring and less finely developed proboscides and antennae.

Most of them were seated on spidery-looking stools arranged in a semi-circle. Some were armed with anaesthetic rods, and others carried instruments that consisted of thin ebon-black shafts with glowing cones of a cold green fire. The two aboriginals were standing, and neither carried any weapon or implement. Near them was a little table on which hypodermics and other instruments were displayed.

"What's all this? Another test?" muttered Roverton.

"We'll soon see."

Two of the examiners, each bearing one of the vials of human blood in his delicate, sinuous fingers, came forward and conferred with the seated beings.

Then, by the former, two crystal hypodermics were filled with blood from the vials. Their bearers approached the aboriginals, who maintained a stolid and indifferent air, and proceeded to puncture the abdomens of their ant-shapen bodies with the fang-like needles and inject the blood till the hypodermics were empty.

All the assembled beings looked on in attentive silence, like a medical conclave. Volmar and Roverton, fascinated and a little horrified by this mysterious experiment, were unable to speak.

"Trying it on the dogs, eh?" Roverton finally whispered.

Volmar made no answer; and the words had barely passed Roverton's lips when the two aboriginals suddenly lost their impassivity and began to leap and twist as if in terrible pain. Then they fell to the floor with vehement cries that were half hisses, half shrieks. Both were swelling visibly, as if from the effects of some deadly poison; and the dull-hued integument of their bodies was blackening moment by moment. The injected venom of a hundred cobras could not have produced a more immediate or more appalling result.

"Who could have imagined that?" said Volmar, in low tones of dismay.

"It certainly looks as if human blood didn't mix very well with the life-fluid of these creatures." Roverton was too horrified to make any further comment.

The convulsions of the agonized victims were lessening by ghastly degrees; and their cries grew fainter, like the hiss of dying serpents. Their heads, bodies, and even their antennae, were puffed beyond recognition and had turned to a putrid purple-black. With a few final spasms and twitches, they lay still and did not stir again.

"Ugh! I hope the doctors are satisfied with their experiment."

IT was Roverton who spoke. He and Volmar tore their eyes away from the ghastly sight on the floor in time to see that one of the seated conclave-members had risen and was moving toward them, lifting as he came the ebon shaft with fiery terminal cone which he carried.

The use of this implement, the nature of the cold green flame, and the purpose of its bearer, were all equally uncertain. As the men afterwards reflected, the dwarf's intentions were not necessarily hostile, and may have been those of mere curiosity. But their nerves were on edge with all the cryptical, uncanny adventures and experiences they had gone through, and following on the hideous outcome of the experiment they had just beheld, the sudden movement of the dwarf was fraught with connotations of unknowable menace.

Roverton, who stood a little in advance of Volmar, sprang to one side before the dwarf, and seized the fragile-looking table that was supported on tarantula-like legs. Hypodermics, vials, and other utensils of an unknown medical art clattered on the floor, as he lifted the table and held it in front of him like a shield. Then, facing the suspected assailant, he began to retreat toward the open door with Volmar at his side.

The dwarf, it would seem, was puzzled or confounded by this action for an instant. He paused, then came on with a loud, sibilant cry, waving his weapon. His confreres, rising from their seats in a body, also followed, and ran to intercept the men before they could escape from the room. Their movements were quick as the darting of angry insects.

Swinging the table aloft, Roverton hurled it in the face of his attacker. The creature was beaten down, releasing the lambent-headed wand as he fell; and it shot forward and dropped at Roverton's feet. In a flash, Roverton picked it up, and he and Volmar sprang for the door.

Two dwarfs, fleeter than the others, had managed to head them off and were standing on the threshold. Both were armed with the familiar anaesthetic rods.

Not knowing the properties of the implement which he had snatched from its fallen bearer, but surmising that it must have some efficacious use, Roverton charged the two beings in the door-way. His superior length of arm enabled him to smite one of them on the breast with the green cone, while he himself avoided their paralyzing weapons. The effect of his blow was amazing and terrific. The flowing cone, whatever it was, seemed to burn an instant way through the bodily substance of the dwarf, like a white-hot iron in butter. The creature fell dead with a dark gaping hole in his bosom, and Roverton surprised and thrown off his balance, barely evaded the outflung rod of the other.

However, with a deftness that would have done honor to a professional swordsman, he swerved his weapon and smote the body of the second dwarf, who went down beside the first.

All this had occurred in a mere fraction of time. Faltering or a single misstep would have been fatal. The earthmen leaped across the fallen bodies and cleared the threshold just in time to evade the main group of their pursuers.

They were in a long corridor, which led on one hand to the huge room of parts as yet unknown. They chose the unknown direction. Their situation was desperate. But, after their captivity, and the queer ordeals to which they had submitted, it was good to move freely again.

They sprinted down the corridor with a dozen dwarfs at their heels, finding that their longer legs enabled them to distance their pursuers. At intervals they met others of the laboratory attendants, mostly unarmed, who all leaped back in obvious terror before the lethal wand that Roverton brandished in their faces.

AGAIN the corridor turned, at a reverse angle; and its ruddy flames were succeeded by the glaring mauve of daylight. Volmar and Roverton emerged on a narrow balcony as the everswelling swarm of their pursuers came in sight.

Before them again was the vast, bewildering vision of the white city, with its web of alabaster bridges woven between buildings. It was noon in this world, for the sun which they knew as an unnamed star in Serpens, poured down from a vertical elevation upon the distant streets below.

The balcony, or ledge, was barely seven feet in width, and void of walls or railings.

Shrinking from the dreadful gulfs, the men followed the ledge for some distance, but paused in consternation when a horde of dwarfs issued from a doorway just ahead. These beings, it was plain, had been sent to intercept them.

The first group of pursuers, which now numbered at least a score, was closing in from behind. There were no doors or windows. The only means of continuing their flight was to cross one of those appalling bridges.

"Here goes," cried Roverton, panting, as he led the way along the slender span.

It was a mad race. The men dared not slacken their speed, for their pursuers, two abreast, were crowding the bridge behind them like ants. The danger of being overtaken gave them an added coolness and poise, and they ran with flying leaps on a path where the least indecision or miscalculation would have plunged them into the abyss.

They were nearing the opposing pile, when three dwarfs armed with the paralyzing rods, emerged from a door and ran forward to meet them on the bridge.

Holding his own weapon like a lance, Roverton faced these beings without hesitation. It was a perilous combat, for two of them were side by side, and he could dispose of only one at a time. He struck and parried with lightning agility. Then the two, with yawning holes in their thoraxes, went down in swift succession and hurtled into the half-mile chasm beneath. The third, however, had advanced within reach of Roverton, and thrust viciously with his rod.

Roverton dodged, and would have lost his footing as he teetered within an inch of the verge, if Volmar, standing close behind, had not put out an arm to steady him. Missing, the third dwarf ran headlong upon Roverton's weapon which pierced him through. Roverton disengaged it, and let the falling corpse join its companions in the gulf.

The earth-men reached the opposite building without further interruption; but their pursuers had gained during the combat and now were dogging them closely.

CHAPTER VI

Pursuit

VOLMAR and Roverton found that this building was deserted. It differed materially from the one they had left. The unpeopled rooms were panelled with fantastic paintings and designs that might have been astronomical maps.

An angle of the hall took the men temporarily beyond sight of their pursuers.

"Quick! Let's find a hiding-place or a stairway," whispered Roverton.

Then, in an alcove, they perceived a flight of stairs.

Trusting that their pursuers would continue along the corridor, they began to ascend the stairs, taking three or four of the tiny steps at a leap.

"Haven't these people any elevator systems?" asked Roverton, after they had climbed steadily for several minutes. "It must take them all eternity to go up and down in their skyscrapers like this."

"There may be some other method of transit; though probably it wouldn't be of any use to us without special knowledge regarding its mechanism."

For hours, it seemed, the earth-men toiled from storey to storey of that edifice. The sounds of pursuit had died out. Apparently the dwarfs were still seeking them on lower levels. They met no one in all that endless range of red-lighted stairs and rooms.

Their legs were turning to lead, and

each step was like the heaving of a mighty weight. They gasped for breath within their aerated helmets.

Following the slow, tedious spiral of the stairs, at length they saw a gleam of purple daylight above them, and came out on the building's roof, where a single central spire continued to escalade the heavens.

No one was in sight, and the roof was seemingly unoccupied. But several air-craft were approaching, and fearing to be seen by their occupants, the earth-men entered a door in the great spire. Here they found a staircase, and resumed their eternal climb.

At the top they emerged in a curious open cupola whose lofty dome was filled with large perforations. The place was lined with instruments that were doubtless astronomical. There were cosmolabes and armillaries, strange double and triple mirrors of white mineral, and lenses arranged behind each other in curving, semi-circular frames. In the center of the alabastrine floor, the men perceived a sable disk, perhaps four feet in diameter, and depressed about six inches below the floor level. From the middle of the disk, and close together, there rose two upright rods.

At first they did not see that the cupola was occupied. Then, behind the litter of strange appliances, they perceived a wizened and aged-looking dwarf, bowed above a sort of dial on which were slanting rows of rubricated ciphers. He was unarmed, and did not hear the earth-men till they were close upon him. Then he turned and saw them.

Ungovernably startled, it would seem, by the apparition of beings who must have been supremely monstrous from his view-point he darted away from the dial and sprang toward the black disk. Roverton intercepted him.

TERRIFIED by the glowing weapon which the earth-man waved in his face, the dwarf circled back among the crowded instruments and contrived to elude both Volmar and Roverton and win the head of the stairs. There he disappeared from their ken at breakneck speed.

"Too bad we didn't get that fellow," said Roverton. "Now the whole pack will be here presently."

Soon to their ears came a confused babel of shrilling voices and a horde of dwarfs emerged on the roof below them and streamed toward the central spire.

"They couldn't have been so very far behind us, after all," Volmar commented.

Roverton was considering the various instruments in the cupola with an estimating eye. Some of them were set in the floor by means of metal bars and pivots, but many others were detached or loosely mounted. He picked up a singular object consisting of no less than seven concave lenses framed among rods and wires of a malachite-colored metal. It was satisfyingly heavy and would make an effective missile.

"We can hold the stairs while the ammunition lasts," he said.

Volmar was lifting a small armillary to try its weight. Between them, the men collected everything movable in a great pile at the stair-head. They had no sooner finished doing this, when the foremost of their pursuers came in sight. The winding steps were packed with these creatures, most of whom were furnished with anaesthetic rods, ignescent wands, or other odd weapons.

The men began to hurl their fantastic missiles at the throng—a barrage of metal orbs and mirrors, and queer-angled things which may have served the purpose of telescopes, eyeglasses, and spectroscopes. The front rows of assailants were driven back with crushed heads and broken limbs, and many were slain or paralyzed by their own weapons as they went down in a tangled mass that blocked the stairway.

In an orderly manner, seemingly unperturbed by all these casualties, the dwarfs proceeded to clear away their dead and wounded, and then came on as before. More were swept down by the remainder of the observatory's detachable paraphernalia; and much havoc in particular was inflicted by two armillaries which Volmar raised in his arms and sent crashing into the vanward files.

The supply of missiles was now exhausted; but Roverton still retained his death-dealing wand, and Volmar had reserved a sort of lens-apparatus which he intended to use as a mace when their attackers came within reach.

With the same hideous unhuman imperturbability, after halting long enough to remove the victims of that final barrage, the dwarfs resumed their advance, while the earth-men awaited them at the stair-head.

Roverton, quick-eared and alert, as he watched the thronging onset, was aware of an odd noise from behind, as if something had clashed lightly against the cupola. Turning, he perceived that an air-vessel, shaped somewhat in the fashion of a long, crescent-prowed barge, but without wings or any visible agency of levitation, had attached itself by coiling tendril-like chains to the cupola-columns, and was discharging a dozen dwarfs into the observatory.

Roverton called Volmar's attention to the new danger.

"If you can hold the stairs, Captain, I'll tend to these customers," he said, and sprang to meet the invaders. These dwarfs were furnished with weapons of a kind which the earth-men had not hitherto encountered—long, trumpetlike tubes, which they leveled immediately at Roverton. Their curling fingers played on certain knobs which studded the tubes, and from the mouth of each weapon there issued a jet of pearly vapor. All were aiming at Roverton's head, and he surmised that the vapor was some sort of deadly gas or anaesthetic. The goggles of his mask were blinded by the fumes, and he could see nothing as he groped among the strange paraphernalia in the dome.

Tripping against some unseen object, and trying to save himself from a fall, he lurched forward and stepped down with a terrific jar on the broad central disk that was set below the floor-level.

Clear of the pearly fumes, which still played overhead, he saw his assailants for an instant, crowding toward him with their weird weapons, as he clutched with his free hand at one of the upright rods which rose from the disk. Then he heard Volmar cry out, and turned his head toward the Captain, jerking the rod involuntarily as he did so. He saw in the merest flash of time that Volmar had fallen, and was half-hidden by the dwarfs who thronged about him from the stairs. Then the scene vanished, as if a black curtain had rushed upward upon it, and Roverton realized that the disk was dropping away beneath him with dizzy velocity in a long, dark shaft.

CHAPTER VII

Trapped!

HE surmised that he was in a sort of elevator. The jerking of the rod as he steadied himself in turning toward Volmar had started its downward flight. The thing was falling like a plummet, and he clung to the rod to keep from striking the walls of the shaft.

Soon, in the darkness, there came a series of red flashes, almost merging with one another. These must indicate the openings from the shaft into the various floors of the main building. Doubtless, by manipulating one or other of the rods, he could check or reverse his descent. For a moment, he thought of trying to return. He would go back to the tower and die fighting beside the fallen Volmar. But Volmar was dead—and what was the use?

Heartsick, unutterably confused and bewildered, black weariness descended upon him like an overpowering weight.

With a dull fatalism, in complete despair, he watched the red flashes. There must be hundreds of them, he thought. He was plunging down to a world whose actual soil neither he nor any other man had yet trodden; among the all-encompassing terrors and perils of a hostile planet. He resigned himself. He was not yet weaponless, for the lethal wand, with its green cone glowing brightly in the darkness, was still clutched in his right hand.

Abruptly, with no noise or jarring, the elevator came to a full stop. Roverton's limbs and body were inundated by a low doorway. At the same time, his ears were assailed by a medley of rumbling sounds and deep metallic throbbings which appeared to come from all around him. He had the feeling that he was underground, that his descent had precipitated him from the topmost tower into the nether vaults of the colossal city.

Cautiously he stooped and squeezed himself through the opening, which afforded ample passage for beings like the opalescent dwarfs but was rather scanty for a full-grown earth-man. Blinking in the saffron brilliance, he peered about him on a chamber so enormous, of such indeterminate scope that it seemed to partake of infinitude. It was filled with gigantic engines that appeared to use and combine every possible geometric form in their overbeetling bulks of dark stone and burnished metal.

The yellow light emanated from a sort of open vat or furnace in which was a glowing mass of molten substance. There were other flaming furnaces at intervals, and great red eyes that burned in many of the machines, pouring down a lurid effulgence.

From some of the mechanisms, huge, ramifying pipes went up and vanished in the darkness of a funnel-like dome. In the wildly flickering patches of light, and monstrous masses of shadow, Roverton saw dim, titanic figures, but did not realize at first that they were living beings. They were ten or twelve feet in height, and were strange and uncouth as the mechanisms which they tended. There were also two or three dwarfs, who appeared to be supervising their labors.

Roverton surmised that he had stumbled into a power-plant of some unknown kind. The giants, mayhap, were members of a subject people enslaved by the dwarfs and compelled to toil in their subterranean vaults.

THE nearest furnace, watched by a single giant, was fifty feet away, and its warder had his back to Roverton. Hoping to escape observation in the vastness and gloom of the chamber, the earth-man started to make his way toward certain of the towering mechanisms that were dark and seemingly untended. He had no idea where he was going or what he would find; and he had reached the exhaustion point, both physically and mentally.

The drug injected by the dwarfs seemed to be dying out in his veins, and he tottered with an intermittent weakness. Also, he was stunned by the loss of Volmar, his Captain and comrade. His brain, his senses, his muscles, were no longer functioning normally. It did not even occur to him that he might have stayed in the elevator shaft and found his way back to some other level where escape would not offer so many hazards.

He had nearly reached the shadow of a huge pyramidal mechanism, when one of the giants saw him and started in pursuit. The creature came on with lumbering, elephantine paces, and looking back as he fled, Roverton saw its face for the first time in the lurid furnace-glare. The thing was a biological nightmare, with one swollen, blazing, sulphur-yellow eye where the mouth would be in a human face, and all the rest a mass of writhing, viperish tentacles around a central slit. The limbs and body were no less monstrous than the face.

Roverton ran, in an access of horror-stimulated strength; and doubling in and out among the dark machines, he contrived to throw his clumsy pursuer off the track. But there were harsh roarings, audible above the noise of the engines, which indicated that others were joining in the chase. Also, he heard the shrill, sweet sibilation of one of the supervising dwarfs.

Luckily, this part of the chamber was untenanted. He ran madly, interminably in the semi-darkness, and came at last to the chamber's end. Here he discovered a dimly yawning exit, and plunged headlong through it on an inclined plane, going downward at an angle of twenty degrees. The plane led to another vault, deserted and perhaps disused, where he would have found himself in utter darkness if it had not been for the glowing wand which he still carried By its weird light, he saw the looming bulks of other massive engineries.

Hastening on between rows of these mechanisms, he heard the roar of pursuit and saw the red flare of moving lights behind him in the gloom. He fled on through an eternity of cyclopean metal cones and cylinders, of black retorts and flameless furnaces, and reached another exit. This led into what was plainly a natural cavern, with rough nodular walls in which he caught the glistening of pale, mercurial ores.

The cavern turned and twisted like a serpent, and soon began to narrow. Its floor and sides were damp with drippings, were mottled with a soft, oozy marl. His feet slipped in puddles from which loathly creatures, half-batrachian, half insect, writhed and wriggled in sluggish alarm to avoid his feet.

With dimming senses and failing muscles, he still went on. His mind was becoming a partial blank: he had almost forgotten everything that had happened, and the horror of it all was a vague amorphous blur. Even his own identity was doubtful as a half-remembered dream. He was only a dying atom of consciousness, lost in a monstrous world without meaning or reason, without boundary or end.

SLOWLY, obscurely, he perceived that something was retarding his progress. Long, whitish ropes and tendrils were hanging in a curtain from the cavern roof; and he had blundered into them without seeing. What they were he could not imagine. His brain groped for analogies, for similes that he could not recall.

The ropes and tendrils seemed to be twining about him, growing over him, enmeshing him from head to foot like a web of whip-snakes; and some of them recoiled and twisted with an undulating motion at the touch of the fiery-headed wand in his hand.

Roverton fought instinctively to free himself, in a nightmare of dim terror and exhaustion. He swayed back and forth but the ropy meshes held tenaciously. He sank into a half-swoon, and the wand fell from his fingers; but he himself did not fall, but was supported by the clinging growths. What these were he never knew; but doubtless they belonged to some type of organism midway between the vegetable and animal kingdoms.

He heard voices, and saw a flash of light on the pale, hundred-stranded web that held him. With a start of returning consciousness, he knew that his pursuers had found him. But it did not seem to matter greatly. Nothing mattered, now that he had lost Volmar and had gone astray in the clueless labyrinth of a dark infinity.

CHAPTER VIII

Into Space

ROVERTON'S memories of what followed were partial and fragmentary. There were starts of full awareness during a period of semi-oblivion, in which he realized that he was being carried by the boa-thick arms of one of the giant laborers who had pursued him. By flashes of sullen, lurching light, he saw the unthinkable face of this creature above him, and saw the indistinct bulks of the subterranean mechanisms.

He seemed to go on for aeons in some underground avenue, cradled by an ever-swaying movement that lulled him to troubled drowsiness. Then, all at once, though he knew not how nor where, he was going upward in a great abyss of darkness toward some far-off, watching eye of light, and metal chains were about him in lieu of the giant arms. He closed his lids to avert a feeling of dizziness. Then, after a while, his swoon became complete; and he saw no more till he opened his eyes in a glaring radiance.

For awhile he could recall nothing of all that had happened to him, could understand nothing on which he gazed. His eyes were half-blinded by a pitiless light, were assailed and stabbed by stupendous imageries. He seemed to be looking down into a violet-purple gulf, in which hung the inverted alabaster walls and portals and towers of a gigantic architecture; and he himself was suspended, as if by some reverse gravitation, from the bottom of this topsy-turvy world.

Then, all at once, he had the feeling that he was not alone. Turning his head with a great effort, he found to his incredulous amazement that Volmar, bound with thick leathery looking cords to pegs in a metallic surface, was hanging beside him.

Whether Volmar was dead or alive, he could not yet know. The closed lids beneath the goggles of the Captain's mask were wan and still as marble. But Roverton felt a joyous surprise that they were together again, and the emotion served to revive him and clarify his muddled faculties. Yet he feared to speak, lest Volmar should not answer him.

There was an instant of uncanny *bouleversement* while all about him seemed to whirl and circle like a mighty wheel. Then he knew that he was lying on his back and was staring up at the heavens between the buildings of that city to which he and Volmar had been conveyed in the alien ether-ship.

He tried to sit up, and discovered that he was also bound by means of leathery cords to the metal surface. His head alone was free, and twisting as far as he could, he saw that the Captain and himself were in the center of a wide street or square, with the people of the city standing about them in a solemn, quiet crowd. The men were tied to something that appeared to be a sort of platform. Its area was indefinite, but it could not have risen more than a foot above the street level.

Roverton felt the enigmatic gaze of the nacre-colored dwarfs, who were all looking on in absolute silence. Beyond the myriad structure, at the end of an almost infinite avenue, he beheld a sinking sun that had nearly touched the horizon and was tinging the white towers with supernal rose and amethyst.

What was to happen, he wondered? Were he and Volmar destined as a sacrifice to some ultra-sidereal deity? Were they to be the victims of some occult, unknowable scientific experiment? The silence of the throng about them was laden with a meaning which he could not apprehend, and was ominous with unreadable secrets of a trans-cosmic psychology. He knew nothing, would never know anything, of this incomprehensible race.

The dead, utter silence was broken by a loud click, followed by a whirring sound as of some metal wheel or spring. The world beneath Roverton seemed to quiver and surge, the staring faces disappeared from his vision, and he saw that the thing to which Volmar and himself had been bound was rising rapidly in air among the fantastic bridges and structures of the city.

BALCONIES rushed by him, he caught flying glimpses of the dwarf people who were passing to and fro on slender spans. Then he was level with the roofs and towers, and as these fell away beneath him, he had once more that horrible sensation of hanging downward, and felt that he was sinking into some unfathomable gulf. About him now there was nothing but empty space.

"Where are we?" A feeble voice had spoken at his side.

"Are you really alive?" cried Roverton, as he turned toward Volmar and saw that the pale eyelids had opened.

"Apparently we're both alive, incredible as the fact may be. But that isn't answering my question as to where we are."

"As far as I can tell, we are on some sort of anti-gravitational raft and are headed for outer space. Our hosts, it would seem, have definitely decided that you and I are undesirable aliens in their world. . . . But what happened to you in the tower? The last I saw, you had fallen; and I thought surely you were dead."

"I've certainly been dead to the particular planet which you say we are quitting. Those fellows started throwing their anaesthetic rods at me, while you were fighting the crew from the air-ship. One of them got me with the business-end—and that is the whole story as far as I am concerned. I suppose yours is about the same."

Roverton gave the Captain a brief outline of his own adventures, as well as he could recollect them.

"Then there was an elevator," said Volmar. "I wondered about that black disk the astronomer was in such a hurry to reach."

"It's a wonder they didn't kill us outright, considering all the damage we inflicted," was Roverton's comment after a minute of silence. "Maybe they didn't mean to hurt us at all, in the beginning."

"Yes," said Volmar sadly, "we may have misunderstood them. Certainly that can happen all too easily, between members of such wholly divergent races, who have no medium of communication and, in all likelihood, no ideas or motivations in common."

Their ascent had continued at an undiminished rate. Though they were soaring into full sunlight, the sky had darkened rapidly and was taking on the ebon of ultra-atmospheric space. Stars were visible everywhere. They must be penetrating the planet's envelope of air; and they would soon reach the interstellar ether. The warmth of the world below had given place to a boreal cold that made itself felt through their insulated clothing.

"Well, I guess this is the end," said Volmar. "You and I will continue our spatial voyage indefinitely—but we won't be in a condition to know anything about it. A few more minutes and we will freeze so stiff that we could be broken into powder with a hammer. Then we will drift on in space, among the whirling suns and systems, and perhaps afford a third-rate meteor for some world whose gravitational influence is strong enough to attract the mechanism on which we are bound."

"Yes, I suppose it's the end. Well, good-by, Captain."

"Good-by, Roverton."

The cold stung like a million needles,

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then the stinging became blunted and both men began to feel drowsy. They would have fought the drowsiness, but there seemed to be no use in prolonging their period of suffering. Numbly, somnolently, they resigned themselves to the inevitable Lethe and closed their eyes on the black circle of space with its myriad suns.

A far-off thrumming, faint as with the gulfs of incomputable distance, but mechanically persistent, seemed to draw them back from the deadly depth into which they were sinking.

They opened their eyes. A long, shining bulk was posing above them in the heavens. It was the *Alcyone!* They rose toward it, they saw it veer and dip and soar again to keep pace with their ascent.

It came close, it paralleled their flight with looming sides in which a manhole had opened.

GRAPPLING-IRONS were thrown out, and the thing on which they rode was caught and drawn level with the ether-ship. Then, incredible, someone had emerged from the manhole, was standing above them, was cutting their bonds with a knife. Strong arms lifted them, and carried them through the air-lock into the warm interior of the *Alcyone.*

Half an hour later, after a course of vigorous massage to ward off possible frost-bite, and a good meal to fortify their starved and exhausted systems, they lay in their bunks and exchanged narratives with Jasper and the crew.

Jasper, it seemed, had been impelled by an intuition of evil to follow them with three of the men when they did not return to the ship within an hour after starting for that saunter among the woods of the Mercurian world.

They had traced Volmar and Roverton readily by their footprints, and had found their automatics near the animal-burrow.

From there on, the trail was even plainer, with the multitude of strange tracks which gave evidence of capture by unknown beings.

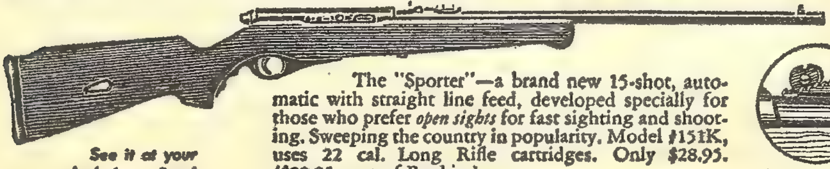
Jasper and his companions had hastened on, running most of the way, and had sighted the alien space-flier in time to see the two men lifted aboard. The vessel had risen immediately afterward and had flown slowly away in the twilight heavens, heading apparently for an orb which they identified as the second planet of the unnamed sun.

Hastening back to the *Alcyone,* they had given pursuit, and had managed to come in sight of the strange vessel once more, after many hours, as it landed in the white city at dawn. They had carefully located the huge, spireless building on whose roof it had gone down. Then, during the short, nine-hour day of the planet, they had hung aloof in space, waiting for darkness, with the intention of descending and making some effort to find Volmar and Roverton and rescue them.

Nursing this heroic and wholly desperate plan, they had seen the mechanism on which Roverton and the Captain were bound, floating up from the city like a mote in the fiery sunset, and had flown to investigate it.

"Of all the lucky breaks!" said Roverton, when the tale was finished.

"With that kind of luck," added Volmar, "I don't think that anything can keep us from navigating one or two more solar systems, at least."



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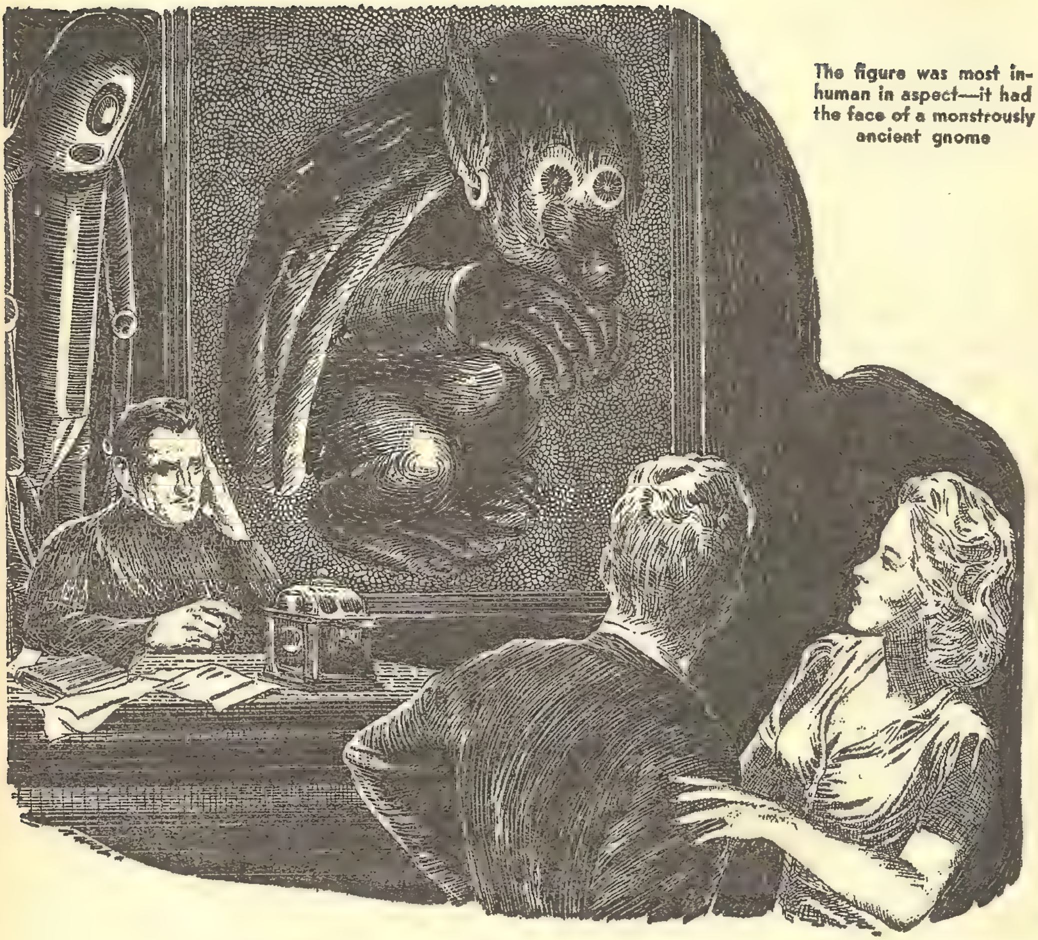

The figure was most inhuman in aspect—it had the face of a monstrously ancient gnome

MUSEUM

A New Story by FRANK BELKNAP LONG

John and Brenda Cosgrove visit the institute that isn't there!

MUSEUM? Young feller, I've lived in this town fifty years, man and boy, and I've never seen the headlights of a museum!"

The cracker-barrel philosopher seemed amused by his own wit—or lack of it. He chuckled and teetered back on his heels, squinting through the fog at Cosgrove.

The fog had gathered in front of the general store in folds so thick the rustic's lank body seemed wrapped in a ghostly shroud. But his suspender straps were the opposite of ghostly. They snapped with a twang as he let go of them, as if to emphasize his contempt for city folk.

"Oh, dear!" Brenda exclaimed from

the convertible. "We must have lost our way again!"

"I don't think so." Cosgrove's voice was edged with anger. "This is Three Oaks Junction, isn't it?"

"It is, sure as rain!" the lank man conceded. "I don't like to brag, mind you, but it's a mighty progressive little town. Show me another town this size that's got a new post office right next door to a hospital, both put up inside of two years! What would we be wanting with a museum, young feller?"

"How should I know?" Cosgrove snapped. "I'm simply telling you that I've a letter here from the Three Oaks Museum of Adaptive Anthropology and the Plasto-Sciences, offering me a splendid staff job!"

Cosgrove grimaced. "I'll admit the title stuck in my gullet. But I happen to be a scholar in search of a steady income. I don't like to brag, mind you, but I'm the kind of scholar who could say something we'd both regret—in smoking-car Latin!"

The rustic's eyes sparkled. "My kid's in third year high and he can spout Latin faster than I can talk politics. Never heard anyone cuss in it, though. Go right ahead, young feller. I'd like to hear how it sounds."

With a grunt more expressive than a Gallic war whoop straight from the lips of Vercingetorix, Cosgrove swung about and went striding back to his car. He climbed in and stepped on the gas so abruptly that Brenda had no time to brace herself.

For a town as progressive as Three Oaks the road was in a sad state of disrepair. The car lurched, skidded and almost passed through a billboard, wrenching a scream from Brenda. But Cosgrove used his fine mind in a practical way and survived to reach the outskirts of what appeared to be a town of ghostly dimensions, wrapped in the torture chamber atmosphere of a Turkish bath.

"That old coot was lying in his teeth!" he gritted. "He must have resented my Harvard accent!"

"Harvard my foot!" Brenda scoffed. "You went to school in Des Moines. If you must know you talk like somebody's great aunt, squinting down from an iceberg at people who lean over backwards to be friendly."

"That letter wasn't sent to me by a practical joker!" Cosgrove said, eyeing his wife. "It would cost too much to fake the engraving on the envelope. People don't get up enormous pageants just to scare their friends out of a night's sleep!"

"Look around you!" Brenda retorted. "Do you see any museum? It's just a quiet sleepy little town. On a bright day in midsummer it would be grand to stop off here for a sandwich or to look at old brass kettles. But a museum would sink a town like this."

Brenda turned to get a better look at her husband's face, a mischievous twinkle in her dark-fringed eyes. "It's adorable and I love it. But there's no job here for you, darling. Museums are on the heavy side. They just don't go with antique shops and wistaria memories left over from yesterday!"

The fog had rolled back a little on both sides of the road and they could see deep into the countryside. It was sweet farming country, fragrant, pleasant, the kind of country that city dwellers only pretend to despise.

But Cosgrove wasn't looking at the furrowed fields and crabapple orchards that cascaded toward the car through a revolving funnel of mist on the right side of the road. He was gripping the wheel with both hands, and staring past his wife's impassive profile with his lips sucked in.

IT wasn't a swamp exactly—it couldn't have been! And yet the great gray building seemed to rise straight out of a sogginess so pronounced that it could be sensed even from the road. The ground had a moist unstable look.

It was a tumbled waste of moss-covered rocks, hueless lichens and clinging vines. It writhed up about the bulk of a structure so huge that it reminded Cosgrove of a gigantic stone quarry, carved up in one piece and molded into a building by storm and earthquake.

It was an insane impression and he shook it off. But try as he might he could not wrench his gaze from the stone-carved lettering which sprawled across the face of the structure like an inscription on a tombstone in a valley of giants.

THREE OAKS MUSEUM OF ADAPTIVE ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE PLASTO-SCIENCES

Huge and plain, the letters seemed to increase in height as Cosgrove stared up at them. In utter silence Cosgrove pulled up at the edge of the road, shut off the motor and turned the key in the ignition lock. There was a triumphant gleam in his eyes as he turned to face his wife.

"Well?"

"You win, darling," Brenda conceded, her gaze on the towering structure beyond the windshield. "Don't ever say I'm not a good loser!"

The robot seemed to be expecting them. Brenda shrieked when she saw it blocking the great shadowy entrance hall. It was at least seven feet tall and it came striding toward them out of the gloom with its long arms dangling.

"You are Dr. John Cosgrove, the anthropologist?" the metallic giant inquired, its bulging eyes riveted on Cosgrove's face. "Forgive me, but I must be sure. You see, there are so many curiosity seekers who claim to be distinguished men of science, solely to get in here on days reserved for staff experiments. You have the letter we sent you, of course."

Had Cosgrove been a paralytic he might have been galvanized by horror into reaching into his pocket and producing the letter. But he was in a far more helpless state. He simply stared and gulped, taking a slow step backward.

The robot's voice became less amiable, almost harsh. "Perhaps I'd better take you directly to Dr. Lemson! It's not really my function to welcome new members of the staff. I'm just a staff experiment day guide."

The robot seemed to mistake for curiosity, the stark terror which flared in Brenda's eyes, for it went on impatiently, "Perhaps I'd better explain. When we throw the museum open to the public no guides are needed. Take the Martian exhibit, for instance!"

Cosgrove's breath was painful in his lungs. He gripped Brenda's arm and started to turn but the robot transfixed him with an accusing stare.

"The Martian exhibit is so simple a child could operate it!" the towering automaton said. "You don't have to become plasticized to go to Mars. You just put on a protective helmet and step into a sending cone with an oxygen tank strapped to your back. A fifty-million-mile journey in a sending cone is safe, swift and painless—unless, of course, you happen to meet a Martian when you come out!"

The robot stroked its face with one segmented hand. "The Museum provides automatic safeguards but sometimes a weapon jams or a visitor becomes careless. Still the accident rate is low. We don't lose many visitors in the exhibits. It's only really unnerving when something comes back no longer recognizably human!"

The robot looked straight at Brenda. "You've got to live dangerously to grow mentally. But simple journeys to Mars, Venus and the outer planets no longer interest the staff. That's *years* in the past. In fact we've shut down the exhibits to the outer planets because they're too dangerous for the public—too safe for the staff!"

The robot seemed aggrieved. "You've got to become plasticized to go to Saturn, for instance, and we're not prepared to plasticize the public. There'd be too many tragic accidents and what earthly good would it do? The public's satisfied with the simpler journeys."

"Are they?" Brenda was unaware that she had spoken, and was appalled at the question she had asked.

"Well, you may be sure we wouldn't send the public on journeys into *time!*" the robot said. "They might get lost in the past and change our future! In fact—"

Before the robot could continue the gloom at its back was rent by a piercing shriek. *"Guide, where are you? I must have help! HELP ME!"*

Cosgrove came to life then. But it was a mockery of animation which seemed alien to humanity. His eyes protruded and his lips drew back from his teeth, so that his face took on an utterly ghoulish aspect.

Brenda simply stared as the robot went striding away into the shadows, her nails embedded in her palms.

AFTER a moment voices came out of the shadows. One was shrill and edged with torment—the other harshly impatient in its pleading urgency.

"Helmet—must have slipped! My limbs—like jelly!"

"I can see that, Dr. Talbot! The node's negative now and it's getting worse. You should have called me immediately!"

"I thought you were right beside me! *Hurry!* Can't you see it's agony?"

"You'll have to hold still, Dr. Talbot. You've been plasticized so fast on the negative node the claws aren't replacing your limbs!"

"I tell you I can't *stand* it!"

"Please, Dr. Talbot. You're only making it worse. Hold still, I beg you!"

There ensued a hideous crunching sound. It was followed by a whimpering, low, inhuman, as though an animal in grievous pain were licking its wounds in an agony of fright.

"That was close, sir!" the robot's voice said. "You'll feel better in a moment. But it would be foolhardy to make that journey to Alpha Centauri now. The gnores can *scent* alienage. You look like a gnore but if you were trapped in a tunnel they'd close in on you like a pack of wolves!"

"Don't you suppose I know that?" came pantingly. "That Fourth Planet ice barrier would just about finish me. I'm as weak as a cat. Recharge that helmet and help me mold myself back into something that's at least as human as my vocal cords!"

"Very well, sir!"

"The public knows we make experimental journeys into space and time but if they had an inkling of what really goes on here we'd have a lot to answer for. Careful with those nodes! I don't want to turn into a mass of embryonic tissue!"

"Naturally not, sir! But in view of your condition it will take ten or twelve minutes."

Ten or twelve minutes! To Cosgrove it was like a breathing spell in a parched and intolerable nightmare. But to Brenda it seemed more like a hairpin curve on a spiraling road to madness. Even as Cosgrove turned he heard her footsteps receding into the shadows. With a convulsive shudder he restrained an impulse to cry out and followed her to what appeared to be the end of the corridor.

When he reached her side she was standing utterly rigid, staring at two brightly lighted apertures that loomed through the gloom at opposite ends of a blank wall. From one of the apertures came a faint droning sound.

Cosgrove gripped his wife's wrist and whispered hoarsely, "We've got to get out now! That robot's strong enough to keep us here by force."

"I'm not leaving!" Brenda's voice rang hard as she turned to face her husband. "Oh, don't! You're hurting me!"

"Brenda, are you mad?"

"Not yet! But I will be if I don't convince myself we're being given some fiendish kind of run-around! This must be a deliberate hoax!"

Brenda freed herself with a wrench and started for the silent aperture. Having lived with his wife for eight years, Cosgrove couldn't quite resign himself to losing her. With a despairing shrug he followed her, his face as grim as death.

The great circular hall seemed too vast to be a part of the building. From its high ceiling to its polished floor it was filled with a cold blue radiance and a long vista of cone-shaped objects which glimmered eerily in the chill glow.

"This is obviously the central hall of the museum and those cones must be the exhibit!" Brenda said.

There ensued a moment of silence while they made sure. The nearest cone was about ten feet high and the inscription at its base seemed to waver a little as Cosgrove stared at it.

VENUSIAN EXHIBIT

This exhibit is open only to properly qualified students. Under no circumstances must an unaccompanied child enter the sending cone. Protective masks and special weapons will be supplied through the central sending channel when the cone materializes on Venus.

WARNING—THE MUSEUM CANNOT ASSUME RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE DISAPPEARANCE OF VISITORS MAKING THIS JOURNEY!

"The museum cannot—" Brenda's lips tightened and her voice rose shrilly. "I've had about as much of this as I can stand. I'm going to put it to the test!"

A chill premonition gripped Cosgrove. But before he could grasp the enormity of his wife's intention she had darted past him and was advancing straight into the cone.

He saw her stand for an instant with her body braced as the radiance swirled up about her, as though she were holding her dread at bay with every ounce of her strength.

Then she was gone! Her body seemed to whip away into nothingness and her face disappeared so quickly the look of stricken horror it bore seemed to linger impossibly on the emptiness like the grin of the Cheshire cat.

Brenda was screaming when her husband found her. She was on her hands and knees in a shallow bog that seemed to mire not only her body but her mind, so that she kept staring at him as he came stumbling toward her with an almost maniacal helplessness in her eyes.

Cosgrove had no clear recollection of emerging from the cone—only of entering it and enduring a horrible sensation of lightness and emptiness as though all the substance had been whisked from his body by a whirling which held him in an iron grip.

BENEATH his feet the ground sloped crazily, shedding its stability with a kind of rush. As he crouched down, locked his arms about his wife's shoulders and struggled to lift her from the bog a suffocating odor of antiseptic smote his nostrils.

Formaldehyde! There was no mistaking it, and its presence dispelled Cosgrove's last shred of doubt as to the genuineness of the exhibit.

Beneath its vapor-envelop Venus was thought to be a vast natural disinfecting plant, impregnated with deadly water-soluble gases of the aldehyde group! As Cosgrove crouched down a hideous image of a medical monstrosity preserved in formaldehyde flashed through his mind, jolting him as if he had been shot with electricity.

But danger that was immediate had a stimulating effect on Cosgrove. He could be unnerved by the unknown but the struggle to breathe was a struggle for life itself and Cosgrove felt a surge of fierce defiance as he swung about with his wife in his arms and went stumbling toward the cone again.

On Venus the cone was luminous. It rose directly in Cosgrove's path, shedding a radiance on the sloping soil and illumining two small masks which bobbed about in the mist a yard from the ground as though suspended on jets of liquid air.

The masks were in such furious motion they seemed to lack permanency of form. One instant they were all eyeholes—the next impossibly twisted and shriveled up. But it wasn't the instability of the masks that sent Cosgrove's heart leaping high in terror.

Something was moving slowly in the bog close to the cone. The creature resembled a gigantic scorpion but it had a bleached desiccated look as though it had been bottled in a jar and shut away from the sun until all its moisture had evaporated. From the tip of its lashing tail to its bug-eyed head stretched a thousand wrinkles and as it rose against the light Brenda screamed and tightened her grip on her husband's neck.

There had to be a logical explanation for what Cosgrove did. It was against all reason, and might well have proved suicidal. He simply made sure he had a firm grip on his wife and walked straight past the monster and into the cone. Into emptiness as well and a whirling lightness that quickly turned into a complete blackout.

"I admire your simplicity, Dr. Cosgrove!" the robot said. "You took that journey as an eager and curious child, putting aside your great learning, preferring it even to the heat death!"

The robot blinked nostalgic eyes as it stared down at Cosgrove and his wife sitting on the floor of the exhibition hall

"What do men seek in life that intelligence on any plane does not seek as well? To explore the unknown, to have companionship with passion, to watch the glories of the physical world unfold as a rapt spectator!

"Even the slow emergence of the seasons is an exhilarating spectacle—August with her autumn finery, the chaste whiteness of December, the golden grain ripening beneath a harvest moon!"

The robot swayed a little, as though mesmerized by its own rhetoric. "Right after I was made I went to Venus too, Dr. Cosgrove! When you're young everything's an adventure. You can just look up at the stars and feel bigger than the universe!"

It seemed to Cosgrove that he could not quite breathe. A faint chill odor of formaldehyde still clung to his clothes and there was a chill clinging to his spine as well, a chill that the cone had failed utterly to dissipate.

But he got to his feet and helped Brenda up the instant he realized that the robot was in no mood to grant them a further reprieve.

"I'm sorry, Dr. Cosgrove!" the robot said. "I'm afraid I must take you to Dr. Lemson! I really must now."

At the end of the great hall before they passed out of it the robot paused before a cone that seemed a little brighter than the Venusian exhibit, to point with pride at an inscription that seemed as new as the robot must have been in the far-off days of its youth.

THE HEAT DEATH

For experimental mannikins only! Special robotic mannikins equipped with recording instruments have been prepared for this exhibit and may be secured by direct application to the curator by properly qualified members of the staff.

"The heat death?" Brenda whispered.

The robot seemed taken aback by Brenda's ignorance. It had no opportunity to be taken aback by Cosgrove's for the latter stood as though turned to stone.

"Why, naturally the Universe ends in a heat death! The Earth does too, of course. But the destruction of the Earth would be far less awe-inspiring than the end of the Universe!"

"And your Dr. Lemson," Brenda breathed. "He—he wants the public to take part in this?"

"Good heavens, no!" The robot seemed shocked. "It's not even for the staff. A mannikin would be vaporized instantly so even the inscription is misleading. But that was deliberate on Dr. Lemson's part."

The robot lowered its voice and its eyes took on an unwonted brilliance. "Actually Dr. Lemson intends to make that journey himself. But first he'll have to work out a plasticization technique that's accident-proof. Going as an incandescent gas would be hazardous. Going in any other form would be fatal."

"Really?" Brenda choked.

"I assure you he's quite serious about it. And he'll do it too. Dr. Lemson always succeeds in accomplishing the impossible!"

"He must be a remarkable man!" Brenda said.

"He is! A *most* remarkable man!"

THE robot lowered its voice again. "Dr. William Lemson is the last of a long line of famous plasto-anthropologists," it said, with an air of prideful confidence. "His great-great-grandfather, Dr. Henry Lemson, founded this museum.

"You see, staff-experiment day guides were not robots in those days. They were simply brilliant young scientists who had not as yet completed their studies. Ordinary robots would have been of no value here. As you know the first robots were dismal failures."

"I didn't know!" Brenda managed.

"But surely you will recall that robots were first used as industrial aids. They were dull wretched creatures with no generosity or warmth, no capacity for human friendship!"

The robot's eyes took on a prideful glitter. "Henry Lemson built the first really mature robot right here in this museum. A robot like myself, a robot designed to take the place of the brilliant young men who originally served as guides. Henry Lemson built the robot to free human energies for other tasks."

"W-what happened to him?" Cosgrove asked. "The robot, I mean!"

"In a very literal sense he was my ancestor!" the robot said. "When age corroded him a new robot was constructed on much the same principle—with minor improvements, of course. I am the fifth."

The robot shrugged modestly. "Perhaps not exactly improvements. But if we did not differ from our ancestors life would quickly cease to have any meaning. We each have something unique to contribute to the forward march of science. For instance, my ancestor was a rigid moralist, distinctly on the stern side. I am a genial skeptic, impulsive, inclined to wink a little at minor infractions of the rules!"

Dr. Lemson's office was quite simply furnished. It contained merely a metal desk, one chair and a huge framed wall picture which depicted ten vertical lines on a mauve and vermillion background. The desk was no more futuristic in design than some which Brenda had seen while window shopping, and the chair was a straight-backed one-legged affair, also fashioned of metal.

Dr. Lemson himself was not visible when they entered the office but he quickly remedied that by appearing suddenly out of nowhere in a sitting down position. No legerdemain was involved. The one-way glass partition which stood directly behind the desk simply parted in the middle and whipped back on well-oiled grooves into the wall.

Dr. Lemson was a stern-featured bushy-browed little man in the prime of life in no way remarkable except for his rigid posture and his peculiar taste in wearing apparel. The Curator of the Three Oaks Museum wore what looked like a carefully tailored waterfall, an incredible garment so subtle in texture that it seemed to blend with his skin and sparkle when he moved. It gave him the aspect of being enveloped in a thin film of running water.

The strange man neither rose nor made the slightest attempt to put the visitors at their ease. He merely stared, probingly at Cosgrove, then with mounting consternation at Brenda.

Suddenly his voice rang out sharply. "Who *are* these people? Not Dr. Cosgrove and his wife! There's a faint resemblance but look at their clothes! Guide, didn't you even *notice* their clothes?"

"Naturally not, sir!" The robot's voice was edged with apprehension. "When I look at people I try to get down to the bare essentials."

Brenda gasped. Dr. Lemson glanced at her coldly, then returned his stare to the robot's jogging head.

"I know what kind of sight you have!" he rasped. "But you could have brought their twentieth century clothes into focus simply by rotating your eyes a little!"

"But I saw no *need* for it, sir!" the robot protested. "Really, sir, I—I— *Twentieth century* clothes, sir?"

Leaning angrily forward, Dr. Lemson transfixed the robot with an accusing stare. "You fool! Oh, you blind, incredible fool! I warned you to be careful with those helmets! When they're maladjusted vibrations seep out and melt down time!"

"You mean we're four hundred years in the past, sir?" the robot stammered.

"Exactly! We've had another time shift! The entire museum must have wavered back to the twentieth century! The last time that happened we returned to our own age in a few hours. But now we may not be so fortunate!"

At which the curator turned and spoke to Cosgrove with such cold and hostile insistence that his voice seemed to congeal the very air about him. "You're not *our* Dr. John Cosgrove! Just who are you? Where do you live?"

"In Chicopee Falls, Massachusetts, Cosgrove really is my name and I'm an anthropologist. I received a letter from the Three Oaks Museum inviting me to join—"

"I see!" Dr. Lemson cut in with harsh impatience, "Same name, same city! You must be a direct ancestor of the Dr. Cosgrove we invited to join our staff!"

"An ancestor!"

"Hundreds of years in the past. Apparently your native city survived into our age and your family was a very ancient one. That is to say, it will be ancient when it reaches our age. You must have received the letter by mistake when we wavered back.

"It was sent by plasto-post, and that kind of transmission is auto-adaptive. We're in the twentieth century now. Naturally a letter addressed to Dr. John Cosgrove in Chicopee Falls would deliver itself to you!"

"A postman delivered it!" Cosgrove protested, a little wildly.

"You mean it created that impression when it delivered itself," Dr. Lemson commented. "I can't go into the intricacies of plasto-delivery but it involves a cerebral factor. If that letter had been delivered in the Roman Empire you'd have received it from the hands of a Roman. A plasto-illusion would have formed and dissolved, leaving you holding the letter."

Dr. Lemson scowled. "Seemingly the Cosgroves possessed genes which predisposed them to scientific pursuits for centuries. It's puzzling, though. When one family lives in the same locality for centuries you usually get decadence of one sort or another. Criminals, idiots. *Hmmm!* Are you sure you are really interested in anthropology?"

Brenda spoke then. "I'm afraid that locality angle won't wash, little man! *My* family moved around but right now you're looking at a homicidal maniac!"

Dr. Lemson rubbed a palm across his brow and gave Brenda a quick probing stare. Then he returned his gaze to Cosgrove. He seemed almost apologetic as he went on, "You realize, of course, that we can't let you return to your age now! If you left while we're still in the twentieth century you might do or say something which would change our future completely."

Dr. Lemson's face assumed a sterner cast. "You realize that, don't you? You know the old saying, 'Great oaks from little acorns grow.' Well, one acorn carelessly dropped in the past could strangle us with a truly monstrous growth of alternative futures.

"For instance, if you just went about telling people there'd be a museum of adaptive anthropology in Three Oaks in four hundred years you'd set a train of events in motion which might very well mean I'd never be born!"

Dr. Lemson leaned back in his chair and smiled, as if he'd settled the matter to the satisfaction of everyone concerned.

The smile vanished when Brenda said, "That would be just dandy!"

Dr. Lemson's jaw closed with a snap. "I was afraid of that! You're one of those stubborn highly emotional women who develop instinctive antagonisms for no reason at all. You dislike me, don't you?"

"What do *you* think?"

"I think—" The curator glared at her. "I think I'd better lay things on the line. That's a very ancient expression, so its meaning should be clear to you."

"Perfectly clear!" Brenda assured him.

"Very well, I'm going to give you an illustration of what plasticity can accomplish!"

As Dr. Lemson spoke he reached under his desk and clicked on a connection which caused the framed picture on the opposite wall to light up.

"Don't expect to see the explorer clearly," Lemson warned. "He's being transformed into an inhabitant of Betelgeuse's fifth planet. But this is an immeasurably speeded-up, condensed time picture of a transformation which has already taken place!"

The standing human figure that came slowly into view in the middle of the lighted frame wore a great shining helmet shaped like a diving bell. He was a dark-browed sturdy man of perhaps forty-five but it was hard to think of him as an individual with definite traits and foibles, for he became a hazy blur in a matter of seconds. Only the enormous helmet continued to shine, becoming brighter and brighter until the entire picture was bathed in an unearthly refulgence.

Then, under the brightness, another standing figure came slowly into view. It would not have been true to say that the figure was wholly inhuman in aspect. But its features were so grotesque that they seemed to cancel one another, leaving only an impression of evil lumpishness.

It was the face of a monstrously ancient gnome with enormous ears and a mouth that seemed all twisted and glued together as though the creature had given expression to thoughts so revolting that nature had punished it by sealing its lips forever.

Dr. Lemson clicked off the connection and the light dwindled. Just before the screen grew dark he said, "Would you care to take that form? It's for you to decide! We can plasticize you in a hundred different ways and send you to any one of four thousand planets."

"Could you?" Brenda's voice was so shrill it was impossible to tell whether she spoke pleadingly or in chill mockery.

The curator's voice took on a steely hardness. "Surely you must realize I have no other choice? I cannot return you to your world and I do not want to kill you. No matter how civilized we become unnecessary violence leaves a—"

"It leaves a stink!" Brenda almost screamed.

The curator studied his hands, as though appalled by their wiry strength. "Yes, I suppose you might say that."

HIS eyes grew harsh again. "Well, you'd better make up your mind."

The robot spoke then. "With a Seral hand blaster they could survive any attack, couldn't they, sir? Those weapons last a lifetime!"

"Yes, of course!" The curator reached under his desk, and jerked open a metal drawer. "The Seral blaster is very compact. All of our explorers carry them. A single blast—well, see for yourself!"

Lemson laid the weapon down on the desk in front of him and leaned back. He smiled coldly. "You'll be safe enough—with that!"

The robot looked straight at Cosgrove, one of its eyes lidding itself for the barest instant.

What followed happened quickly. Cosgrove leapt toward the desk like a man galvanized into desperate activity by an optical reflex which had flashed a wild signal of hope to his brain.

He had the blaster in his hand and was pointing it at Lemson before the curator could stiffen in appalled horror. Lemson did stiffen, however. He did more. He leapt to his feet with a strangled cry and cleared the desk with a straddling leap that carried him half across the room.

Cosgrove backed out of the office, keeping the weapon trained on Lemson. Lemson followed Cosgrove out into the exhibition hall, his face a livid mask of rage and reckless defiance.

Brenda darted wildly past Lemson, her heart in her throat. As she reached her husband's side Cosgrove shouted a warning. "Keep your distance, Dr. Lemson, or I'll blow you apart!"

"You'd die too!" Lemson breathed hoarsely. "That weapon was designed to be used in the open!"

"He's bluffing, darling!" Brenda whispered.

His features savagely contorted, Lemson crouched down and leapt again, straight toward Cosgrove.

Cosgrove did not blast. There was no need for him to blast Lemson down for, as the curator's feet struck the polished floor, they slipped out from under him and he went hurtling sideways, his arms flailing the air.

Cosgrove had no time to identify the exhibit before Lemson went plunging into it. It seemed merely one of the many exhibits that stood in an even white row down one side of the hall.

But when the exhibit began to pulse and glow a horror came upon him which chilled his heart like ice. The exhibit lit up with terrible, unearthly flares. It grew bright, then dark, then bright again. It seemed to pulse hideously in a way that reminded Cosgrove of an elevator descending through a burning building, dropping straight down with a mind-numbing impetus.

Lighting up fiercely when it passed floors aflame, growing chill and dark in the spaces between. Dark—flaming—dark—dark—cold—and then a dreadful searing flare that seemed to shoot straight across the hall to the opposite wall.

There was a hideous, far-off hissing as the flames died, followed by a sound that made Cosgrove think of hail beating against melting glass in an incandescent bubble as vast as space.

As the sound trembled across the hall it awoke little tinkling echoes that died out in utter silence. But for a full minute the cone continued to glow dully like an expiring funeral pyre.

The silence was shattered by a familiar voice saying: "He had to make that journey sometime, Dr. Cosgrove! His heart was set on it. At least he knows now what the Heat Death is like."

The robot hesitated, then almost shyly laid one of its segmented metal hands on Cosgrove's shoulder. "You were the victims of a tragic mistake," it said. "But it's the old, not the young, who should pay for all mistakes. If that doesn't make sense I don't know the meaning of logic!"

Brenda whispered with a shudder: "That was an awful price to pay for a mistake!"

"It wasn't *our* mistake!" Cosgrove said, grimly. "But we can cut ourselves a slice of it simply by staying here until our luck runs out!"

"Yes!" the robot agreed, with chill urgency. "The museum will waver back to our age any minute now! There have been a few tremors already just like the last time!"

BRENDA turned and looked straight into eyes that had crinkled oddly. "Just what will happen to you?" she asked. "Tell me! I've got to know!"

"There'll be a new curator, of course!" the robot said, quickly. "One of our field men will take Dr. Lemson's place. If he asks me exactly what happened I'll have to tell him, of course. But when you live too long you sour like an over-ripe grape, and when that grape drops to the ground another grows out. Individuality would lose all of its savor if life didn't keep replacing itself."

"You mean you'll tell the truth about that wink?" Cosgrove asked, bluntly.

"I'll have to," the robot said. "The museum was built to endure. I was built to remain loyal. But you mustn't grieve. Just forget what will happen to me. You wouldn't have given the matter a second thought if I were just a machine to you!"

"You're not, chum!" Cosgrove said, huskily. "You're not!"

"That makes me feel very proud!"

"You're quite a guy!" Brenda said, her eyes suspiciously moist.

A few minutes later they were driving swiftly away through the fog. There was fragrant farm country around them again but they couldn't see it, for the great sadness that was in them, until Earth's bright evening star swam into view to blink cheerily down at them.

●

When the Earth's Under Pressure, Professor Hurlburt Seeks the Remedy in THE OSMOTIC THEOREM, a Remarkable Complete Novelet by S. P. MEEK Coming in the Next Issue!

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The Cosmic Cocktail

By SIEGFRIED WAGENER

Ed McCall's theory was derided by the father of the girl he loved—so he had to prove that starlight had a kick to it!

SOMEONE in the audience snickered and there were suppressed snorts. But the president of the Society of Physicists remained unmoved. He regarded the speaker with a stern expression, and if he hadn't occupied the center seat of the front row Dr. Edwin McCall might have been more at ease. As it was, Dr. McCall grew more and more restive, sensing the rising opposition of his listeners. He began to twitch his sentences and time and again stopped to pick up a lost train of thought.

". . . It is on account of this principle of cosmic radiation that we're now able to explain, for instance, the strange behavior of, what is commonly called, moon-struck people. In other fields my instruments have proven decisively why certain germs grow most rapidly when exposed to moonlight. It is therefore that I investigated such age-old superstitions as fishing by moonlight and that I found that they are based on scientific fact."

Here the speaker was stopped by the assembly. These cool, controlled scientists were upon their feet with a roar. They yelled and cried, laughing. Even Dr. Herkimer Waldorff-Palmer, the imposing president, laughed so that tears ran down his cheeks.

With painful embarrassment Dr. McCall gathered his papers. He knew that his career as a scientist was finished, temporarily at least. No man who was laughed at during the annual meeting of the Society of Physicists had ever lived down the brandishing of derision.

When the ordeal was over and he had sneaked away to a side room Edwin McCall almost collapsed. His few friends and co-workers were unable to console him.

"Forget it, Mac," he said to MacAllister, whose statistical work had helped him considerably in his research. "It's all for nothing. The ten years I have spent in the High Andes and on Pikes Peak didn't help. The fortune I have spent in research and developing my instruments has gone for naught. It doesn't mean anything to them."

Vaguely he moved his hand. "I'm through. I'm penniless. I've lost out. Maybe when I'm dead . . ." He trailed off and left the sentence unfinished. Mac and the two others stood there like lost. Only too well did they realize the truth in Edwin's words.

WHILE they were standing and pondering the door opened noiselessly. A young lady stepped in and when Mac saw her he stepped silently aside. None of these intimates of Edwin McCall's were astonished to see the daughter of the society's president come here at this time.

Eleanor Waldorff-Palmer, as they knew, was secretly engaged to the unfortunate boy and now all hopes of reconciling the prospective father-in-law were shattered. Eleanor's piquant face and large, somewhat slanted eyes bore a compassionate expression. The superbly featured girl bent over Edwin and ever so gently stroked his hair. He looked up and smiled the wee smile of resignation.

"Cheer up, Ed," she said and tried to put an encouraging note into her words. "Rome wasn't built in a day, you know. And scientists too are human."

"If you mean they are slow-witted I agree with you," he remarked with bitter sarcasm.

Eleanor looked around. The room was empty. Mac and the others had filed out one by one. She kissed him and looked into his eyes with a mischievous little smile.

"I know a way out," she said. Edwin started. "Who is your greatest adversary, Ed?"

"Your father."

"Exactly. If we could succeed in changing his mind, you would have won, wouldn't you?"

"Change the mind of Waldorff-Palmer? Good Lord, child, you ought to know better'n that. He's your father."

"Well, I wouldn't attempt to change his mind by way of argument."

"Which other way is there?"

"Your cosmic reflector."

Now Edwin did get to his feet. He looked at his sweetheart as if she were a ghost from another world. First he was too stunned to speak. Then a grin crept over his tanned face. At last he laughed quietly but without restraint. He grabbed Eleanor around the waist and held her and laughed and laughed.

"Girl," he cried with great mirth, "you are precious, you are—you are just like your father!"

"If that will help us, I shall be grateful for the inheritance," she replied soberly but the devil of tomfoolery was in it. Get your hat and coat and let's go over to your lab. I'm afraid somebody might bust in here any minute."

Through a side door they left the building, got into Edwin's car, and drove off at a fast clip. At the outskirts of the New England university town Edwin had rented a former garage and altered it into a scientific laboratory.

Instead of a roof, the one-room building had a huge skylight of sliding plates which, when opened, permitted a steel structure, a sort of a turret, to be extended through the opening. Work benches were everywhere, cluttered with cameras, tubes, wires, coils and instruments which conveyed no meaning to the uninitiated.

Edwin removed some books from a chair at his writing desk and invited his fiancée to sit down. He placed himself on the desk and, after lighting cigarettes, he glanced at her expectantly.

"Well," she said, "it's all good and well to say what you can do. But you have to prove it. What can you actually do?" She was obviously challenging him. "You told me that your cosmic reflector is able to gather in the rays of almost any star in the sky and that it can direct those rays anywhere you want."

"Yes. I can do that here in the laboratory right now and prove it to you. But I could also take my portable reflector anywhere you want me to and demonstrate it."

"Why didn't you have it along tonight?"

"Because at present I need an open sky. Soon I'll have an instrument that can collect cosmic radiation even through thick walls. But now—"

"Now we have to act," she interrupted him. "You claim that if a person is exposed for any length of time to those reflected rays from your instrument that person might undergo certain mental and physical changes. Is that right?"

"Certainly. I've tried it out on myself. I didn't dare to experiment with other people's health. And I have found that the rays of certain stars stir up an ugly temper."

"That won't do."

"No. Others make a person feel mellow."

"That's better."

Edwin nodded and said, "I know what you're after. I've discovered certain radiation that'll upset a fellow completely, give him wild dreams and drive him to a point where he goes mildly 'nuts' without being actually harmed."

"That's the medicine we need! If you can't convince this world with sane reasoning, Ed, you have to do it with insane methods. Now here is my plan."

It took them several hours to outline their strategy and when Ed took her home even the late moon looked crestfallen. Maybe Luna, after whom some extraordinary characters are called lunatics, divined the scheme the two lovers had agreed upon and was shocked to the bottom of her empty craters.

EDWIN MCCALL'S idea was fundamentally simple if looked upon in the light of Einstein's theory of relativity. The substance of that theory is that whatever there is in this universe of ours is related to everything else, which means that no single thing can exist without all the other things around it. Consequently, life on Earth depends mainly on the sun and the Earth's own radioactivity.

Aside from this, life is to a lesser degree dependent upon—and if not dependent, then influenced by—the radiation of the entire cosmic whirlpool of which the Solar System is but an infinitesimal fraction. To this cosmic radiation, all forms of life are exposed day and night but in daytime the radiation of the outer cosmos is more or less absorbed by the sun while at night such absorption does not take place and human beings are subjected to the full impact of the forces of the outer cosmos.

This was what the scientific minds of Dr. Waldorff-Palmer and his confederates could not stomach—because, they argued, this would throw mankind thousands of years back to a time when stargazers and horoscopes wielded greater power over people than kings and despots, and lastly common sense.

All this Eleanor was told by her benevolent father over the breakfast table the next morning.

"There is no telling what a madhouse of superstition our world may become once we give this fellow McCall leeway. Our people have not yet developed a scientific attitude. America is still full of lucky rabbit feet and horseshoes. Once we let McCall loose, there'll be a deluge of astrology. Science will have to fight that old bogey over again."

"You cannot fight cosmic forces," Eleanor said quietly. Her father dropped the paper and almost spilled his coffee.

"So," he said, "my own daughter thinks superstition is a cosmic force?"

Eleanor shook her head. "No, though few people have ever earnestly tried to find out the true origin of ancient superstition. But that's beside the point. What I meant to say was that if cosmic radiation exists as Ed—I mean Mr. McCall—claims, then all this ballyhoo will gain you nothing. The truth will come out anyway."

Dr. Waldorff-Palmer was too astonished to answer. With a grumble he picked up the paper, folded up the front-page and held it across the table. Eleanor read and her eyes widened.

There it was—a streamer headline that doomed Ed: YOUNG SCIENTIST RIDICULED BY COUNCIL! and a sub-head, *Society of Physicists Laughs at Fantastic Idea.*

"Newspaper talk," she replied. "If McCall had a big name like you they'd call his idea a stupendous discovery." She got up and left the table.

While Eleanor was thus battling with her father Ed had been up and going since early morning. When Eleanor left the breakfast table he was signing a lease in a downtown real estate office. After leaving his modest apartment he had driven his car to a loan company. The clerk had not read the morning papers. So there was no difficulty about lending Edwin McCall the two hundred dollars he was asking for.

Ed had been telling the truth the night before when he claimed to be penniless. Years of research had eaten up his modest inheritance and there was only a trifling amount left in the bank. His unexpected failure had made him a man utterly without means and without a future—for who would hire a man after such crushing defeat?

From the loan company, Ed drove to the real estate people who, as Eleanor had told him, were in charge of the old dilapidated two-story brick building in back of the Waldorff-Palmer residence. The broker was surprised that anyone should be interested in a house which was good for nothing but the wrecking crew. Hence Ed rented the house for a very nominal sum.

Out on the street again Ed was cheerful. He had the keys to 13 Tussel Avenue in his pocket and even though his car carried the unaccustomed burden of a mortgage he could still use it to move his apparatus from his laboratory to his new abode.

This, however, he could not do until night. So he drove back to his laboratory and spent the day preparing his next move. When it was conveniently dark he had his cosmic reflector, wires, tools and other paraphernalia neatly packed in his car and, after a bite in a near-by lunchroom, drove to 13 Tussel Avenue.

The real estate broker assured Ed that electric lights and the telephone were in working condition and though Ed did not care much about the telephone he was exceedingly anxious to have electric current to drive his machinery. Yes, the current was there. He turned on the light but was appalled by the condition in which he found the house. Cobwebs were everywhere and there were all sorts of rushing and rustling noises. Ed was sure that at least rats and mice would keep him company.

WITHOUT even so much as glancing at the first floor, Ed carried his things to the upper floor. Quickly he found the room for which he had rented the house, an empty bedroom with an ancient fireplace full of paper and waste. Ed drew the shades and touched a match to the paper. While the flames crackled hordes of mice made squealingly for the door and parts unknown.

Ed found an old table and some half-broken chairs in the basement. With these he furnished the bedroom, and when the cosmic reflector was standing on the table facing the window, Ed relieved himself of a deep sigh.

The window was wide and facing north. No trees obstructed the sky from which Ed intended to draw the mysterious power which, he hoped, would conquer the fossil conservatism of Herkimer Waldorff-Palmer. The latter's bedroom was directly opposite. Of course there was first the backyard of 13 Tussel Avenue, then a wire fence, then the garden of the Waldorff-Palmer residence—but luckily there was an opening in the trees and bushes through which Ed could look straight into his adversary's bedroom.

THE sky was clear and brilliant with stars. The moon was not up yet and Ed set his cosmic reflector in position. He nailed the table to the floor, put a board on top of it. This board stuck out of the open window and enabled Ed to move his reflector out under the sky. He used a powerful flashlight whose light was reduced to the point of a pinhead to aim his instrument.

Correctly aimed it threw a speck of light at the inside wall of Waldorff-Palmer's bedroom, just above his bed which, as Ed could see through his powerful night-binoculars, was at present unoccupied.

The cathode was all right and the mirrors and reflectors worked perfectly. The generator hummed its melodious song. The night was warm. Ed lighted a cigarette and dozed off. A loud rap on the house-door brought him to his feet. Quickly he pulled the shades and went downstairs.

A couple of policemen were waiting for him. Their car was parked at the curb.

"What do you want," Ed asked them. But it was they who wanted to know what business he had in the house. Fortunately Ed had the lease still in his pocket. They tried to withdraw with apologies when Ed asked them how they had found out about him.

"Well," said one of them, "Doc Waldorff-Palmer called the Sarge. Seems to me he'd seen light in this place."

Ed was grateful to Eleanor for insisting he rent 13 Tussel Avenue under an assumed name. To the policemen he was now Mr. R. H. Bartlett and if Herkimer Waldorff-Palmer should make further inquiries about him he would be unlikely to discover that his prospective son-in-law was the mysterious occupant of the old building across from his backyard and bedroom.

In this bedroom Herkimer Waldorff-Palmer had gone to sleep by the time Ed resumed his post at the window. He didn't light any more cigarettes nor did he permit the faintest ray of light while he was quietly adjusting his instrument to the present position of the Corona group. The radiation from this heavenly constellation could make a fellow's sleep a rather restless affair.

The rays came in well. His spectrometer showed all the color lines Ed could ask for. Slowly he increased the power. The reflected beam was, of course, invisible. Powers unseen and until recently unheard of were at work on a tricky business which bordered closely on witchcraft—and not only in Waldorff-Palmer's opinion.

That gentleman, however, showed not the slightest sign of being affected by the cosmic reflector. After midnight he stirred and Ed, shivering in his topcoat, was already rejoicing when it developed that Mr. Waldorff-Palmer was merely feeling cold and subsequently closed the window.

Ed was thoroughly disappointed. He knew that a window could not deflect his beam or stop it in any way. Stronger than X rays, it would penetrate walls of brick and lose nothing of its magic power which, as Ed was firmly convinced, was there. But where it was tonight he was unable to fathom. He turned on all the power there was in his generator and nearly burned out his costly tubes.

At daybreak Ed turned off the current, closed the window, pulled the shade and went back to his laboratory. He took his tubes along but he was too tired to test them right away. Instead he unfolded himself on one of the workbenches and slept the sleep of the just.

A thoroughly disgusted Eleanor woke him without formality. "I haven't slept a wink since yesterday. All night long I've been sitting up and listening to dad's movements. He slept as soundly as ever and *I* got the jitters from waking and watching."

"Which is decidedly contrary to what my beam should have done," Ed assured the lovely girl miserably. "It didn't work—that's evident."

"You'd better make it work, son—or else we shall never meet at St. Paul's. I brought you a pie and some coffee—you may like it for breakfast." It was five in the afternoon but Ed didn't need a second invitation.

When the last of pie and coffee had found its destination Ed went back to work. He tested a half-dozen small tubes before he inserted his huge reflector tube in the test apparatus. Then he let out a yell.

"Look at that son-of-a-gun," he cried utterly amazed. "All shot to pieces! Must have been knocked down in the car."

Almost with reverence Ed unwrapped a new reflector tube of twice the capacity of the worn-out-one. "I didn't dare to use so much power on your dad," he said while explaining the thing to Eleanor.

"You'd better turn the Niagara loose on him. He's hard-boiled, you know."

ED CONSENTED. The new tube tested okay and even though he was depleting his slim stock he also took a set of brand new small tubes along to 13 Tussel Avenue. On the way there, Eleanor told him that her father had found out that there was a certain Mr. R. H. Bartlett living in the old house across the yard. Ed was also informed that the subject of his being still alive was completely dropped from the conversation in the Waldorff-Palmer residence.

"You wait and see," Ed grunted when Eleanor left his car near home. "I'll show him that I'm still around."

With this dark threat Ed started his second night watch. Until two o'clock in the morning he had to wait for the clouds to have mercy on him. But what then happened was beyond his wildest hopes.

By that time a crazy moon like a half-rotten apple had come up and displayed its light so profusely and handily that Ed could not resist catching it and shooting it in the vicinity of Waldorff-Palmer's head. For a while nothing happened.

After about ten minutes the sleeper stirred. Ed's nerves were taut. He didn't feel the chill in the air. He was glued to his binoculars and what he saw happening in Waldorff-Palmer's bedroom filled his tormented soul with glee.

He could barely restrain himself from shouting with joy when Waldorff-Palmer appeared in his pajamas at the window.

His eyes were closed and his expression blank. His hands groped over the window-sill as if in search for some lost article. Finally they clutched the frame and suddenly the venerable Dr. Herkimer Waldorff-Palmer stood on the sill. There he remained for a while, apparently meditating over the strangeness of this world in general and the peculiar charm of the crazy moon in particular.

His face was upturned and his neck-breaking acrobatics didn't seem to disturb him a bit. It was clear to Waldorff-Palmer's excited audience across the yard that the great scientist was in a state of perfect somnambulism.

He seemed to be bent on nothing less than to fly away from the house and reach, by some moribund magic, the very top of the house in which he had lived for so many years without ever showing any such fantastic desires. But when he reached for the upper window frame, apparently ready to defy his beloved Newton, a shrill cry stopped him short. For a fraction of a second it looked as if he would meet with a premature end. He swayed back and forth before he got hold of the window frame after what seemed to Ed a full-fledged eternity.

It was Eleanor who had let out that untimely cry. Her fiancé could have murdered her. Not only did she spoil his fun with Waldorff-Palmer but she had put that gentleman in considerable danger of his life. Ed turned off the current. He thought that for a beginning it had been quite enough.

Even the next day in his laboratory he would break into cold sweat whenever he thought of Eleanor's cry. But it was not for him to admonish her, because when she entered the door she was so pretty in her fury that Ed resigned himself to take the entire responsibility of Waldorff-Palmer's moonstruck behavior.

"You!" she said like an Amazon rearing for battle. "Do you want to murder my dear old dad, you killer! You belong in prison or in a strait-jacket."

"Yes, dear, I'm a sinner. But if you had not yelled like a Rocky Mountain canary at sunrise all would have been well."

"I've never heard of such a bird," she responded darkly, "but if the thing has a soul he probably killed himself at the sight I had when I ran into the yard to see what dad was doing."

"Well, what did he say?"

"He's so terribly shocked about it that he didn't even go to his office this morning. And he pledged me to absolute secrecy."

"He's got to snap out of that habit."

"What habit?"

"Keeping things secret. What he needs is a half-dozen specialists telling him unanimously that he's a somnambulist."

"Are you crazy?"

"Not yet," Ed answered sadly, "but I soon will be if you don't come to my rescue with a marriage license."

Whereupon they agreed never again to endanger Dr. Waldorff-Palmer's precious life. Ed promised to turn off the current as soon as the "patient" showed the slightest sign of approaching the window. Eleanor was satisfied with this but the following night became the most horrid in her life.

It was one thing for Ed to turn off the current and sit tight while the "patient" was once more leaving his accustomed place of rest but it was beyond any man's power, once the sleep-walking Waldorff-Palmer had reached the window, exposing himself to the direct light of the moon, to shut off the moon.

Things began to happen. Stirred from his slumber by Ed's invisible beam, the "patient" kept on craving the moonlight and was out of his bedroom window with the lightning speed of an amorous monkey.

NO one yelled when he swung free of the window. There was rather deadly silence when the sleeper, methodically using every crevice in the masonry, climbed up to the roof. Ed saw the faint outline of Eleanor embracing a tree in support for her sagging knees and he thanked his creator that a telephone was in the house.

He gave a fire alarm for the Waldorff-Palmer residence and soon the clanging of the fire-bell in the still night air told him that help was coming. He didn't dare to see the rest of the show. He grabbed his hat, jumped into the car and raced away as if Satan *in persona* were following him.

Thus he lost out on the surprise of the hook-and-ladder company and didn't see what havoc they wrought with Dr. Waldorff-Palmer's most cherished possession, his rock garden. This they used as a foundation for their ladder while the aim of their silent but vigorous activity was sitting on the roof's rain-trough, peacefully wriggling his bare toes at the far-away moon.

The morning papers set the campus on fire. The profs had a hard time keeping order in their classrooms, for the students had a way of eyeing the windows that would send gooseflesh up and down the spines of the initiated. And the initiated were, of course, everybody.

When the "patient" was wakened by the fire-fighters by way of a cordial tap on the shoulder while two stories below a dozen men tried to keep the junknet taut, he realized at once that something was amiss. He hardly thanked his lifesavers. Once in the house with his pale and shaking daughter, he started a cursing orgy that would have been the envy of the most profane of his students.

All night long he paced his study and Eleanor, listening to the tap-tap-tap of his feet, was unable to sleep a wink. So when, after hours of waiting, morning came around it greeted with its bright sunlight a daughter who was in more than one way a wreck and a father filled with the coldest and fiercest fury ever recorded in the family of Waldorff-Palmer.

They were still sitting at the breakfast table—not a word was said—when the bell rang and the old family doctor, Mortimer Ezekiel Holmes, put his friendly, wrinkly face through the door and said hello.

But his good and great friend Mortimer was just as puzzled about Herkimer's nightly escapades as the patient himself. Besides putting a tub with cold water in front of the bed of the somnambulist he could think of no remedy for his friend's strange behaviour.

Hence New York was called on the wire and by evening the country's foremost psychiatrist, Dr. Helmer G. Ganus, strutted to the entrance. In the master's study the important authority placed himself in the easiest chair available and asked his host more direct than courteous what had happened. Waldorff-Palmer explained as best he could and there was a long silence after he finished his story.

At last Dr. Ganus re-assembled himself, puckered his brow and asked a question. "Anything of the sort in the family? Insomnia, neurosis, somnambulism or anything that'd be an indication?"

"Nothing, nothing at all," was the weary reply.

"Strange," muttered the psychiatrist. "But moonstruck you are—ahem—I mean, obviously a case of somnambulism. Ever try psychoanalysis?"

"Heavens, no! My dear friend, I'm not a nitwit!"

"Tut-tut, Waldorff-Palmer. We never know what we are and your case proves the thesis."

Waldorff-Palmer shook his head forlornly. The New Yorker was right. If a fellow his age started such antics as somnambulism, anything was possible, even some case of hidden insanity in his family.

"One thing could solve the riddle," the authority was oracling.

"What's that?"

"Hypnosis, foreign suggestion. If there was anybody around who'd aim to drive you insane, that he or she could by way of hypnotical influence—"

"Utterly impossible, Dr. Ganus."

It was finally agreed that Dr. Ganus should stay overnight and sleep in Waldorff-Palmer's bedroom in order to keep an eye on the patient. Waldorff-Palmer began suffering from the delusion of being an inmate of an insane asylum.

Eleanor had used the prolonged consultation of her father's to rush around the block and see Ed, whom she found in a state of profound mental agony. After she was through telling him what she thought of him and his cosmic reflector he sat there on his chair and said nothing.

"Maybe it is me more than your father who is in need of that psychiatrist," he said finally. "But if I stop now that psychiatrist will get all the credit and I simply hate psychiatrists."

"No one cares whom you hate."

"Maybe so," he said, "but I had the faint hope you loved me and would stick it out with me for that little matter."

"It isn't a little matter," she cried defiantly. "I really do love you."

"Well then, we have to give your dad another shot tonight." Eleanor almost passed out at this prospect while Ed continued apparently unperturbed, "Not moon rays. He's got enough moonshine now. We'll try a bit from the Corona and a bit from Virgo. Maybe a little mixing wouldn't hurt either—sort of a cosmic cocktail, you know. Anyway, let that psychiatrist earn his money."

Eleanor went home not knowing whether she should jump into the river or tell her father the truth.

PATIENT and doctor spent a quiet night—but Waldorff-Palmer was far from being satisfied. Though he had not tried to get out of the window his sleep was by no means a joy. All night long he had spoken in his dreams and Dr. Ganus, who had taken notes, told his patient that he had never heard of a man who could juggle the heavenly bodies as violently and persistently as Waldorff-Palmer had done from exactly 11:30 P.M. until 4:58 A.M.

Thereafter the patient had slept without trying to wake the neighborhood. "But," added Dr. Ganus, "it was the sleep of exhaustion."

Dr. Ganus left his charge in the care of Mortimer Ezekiel Holmes. Dr. Ganus suggested bromide, veronal and an occasional hypodermic if the patient should again show signs of wild climbing desires. This, Dr. Holmes thought ridiculous.

"I'll tell you what's the matter with you," he addressed the patient after the specialist had left. "You are worn out, old boy. Getting old, understand? You ought to lay low for a while, go on vacation."

"I'm not old at fifty-nine. No other widower could live more peacefully than I."

"Then get yourself a wife," grunted the unbendable Mortimer, taking his hat and saying good-by—which didn't help matters particularly because Waldorff-Palmer would not, even in his nightmarish dreams, have thought of marrying again.

Those dreams were the last word in horror to Waldorff-Palmer. They convinced Eleanor that Ed's cosmic reflector could not only effect a change of mind but also certain physical alterations. As the first week went by, every night of which found Ed at his post, Waldorff-Palmer began to look the mere shadow of his former self. Eleanor became more and more worried and sought ways and means to end the ordeal.

Ed, however, would not hear of it. He was determined to let Eleanor's father suffer for at least another week before opening his eyes as to the source of his somnambulism and nightmares.

Ordinary dreams are, as a rule, not very bothersome. But Waldorff-Palmer's dreams were not at all of an ordinary nature. He hated them worse than the firemen who had ruined his rock-garden.

What mortal cherishes the idea of being yanked out of bed night after night and sent sprawling, not on the floor—no, out into the icy universe? Whenever he closed his eyes, and—marvel of marvels—he could still sleep, he began at once a wild journey out among the stars. Time and again he would shake himself awake when he caught his second self jumping from one star to another with a speed compared to which the speed of light was the mere waddling of a turtle.

Once he wakened with a wild shout, for he had inadvertently stepped on the hot surface of the sun and the burning pain shot through him like all the fires of inferno. Upon waking, however, Waldorff-Palmer discovered that a spring of his mattress had come loose and was tickling the sole of his right foot.

It was perhaps fortunate that he confided in his daughter, who in turn handed the information to Ed. Ed's keen instinct for research told him that here was a chance in millions to find out exactly how a human being reacted under the cosmic influence of the various heavenly bodies.

To this young scientist it didn't seem strange at all that one night Waldorff-Palmer should step on the sun when Jupiter was in close proximity with Old Sol, that on another occasion he should play billiards in the Milky Way when Ed was drawing magic rays from the outer fringe of that cosmic whirlpool. He listened closely to Eleanor's tales about her father's dream escapades and as soon as she had gone he recorded her reports almost word for word.

It was thus that Dr. Herkimer Waldorff-Palmer became a great benefactor of mankind and it was thus that he almost resigned from his office.

One morning the Dean of Men caused a turn of events which approximated catastrophe. The dean was explaining his monthly report when he caught his superior gazing absentmindedly out of the window. For a while he ignored this discourtesy but after some significant coughing failed to bring Waldorff-Palmer around to business on hand the dean had gathered his papers and left, remarking that he would return at a more appropriate time.

When the door shut behind his visitor, Waldorff-Palmer finally did come around. "Where did he go?" he inquired innocently of his secretary.

"Oh—he—errr—well, I mean, he thought you didn't feel well enough." The poor girl was quite obviously another victim of Ed's scheme.

Waldorff-Palmer exploded and his secretary ducked low over her typewriter. When his wrath subsided and things were getting back to normal he mumbled more or less to himself, "Sometimes it looks as if the cosmos were taking revenge for McCall."

The secretary pricked her ears. And because women are women it took only a few hours and everybody on the campus was whispering into everybody else's ear the bad tidings that Waldorff-Palmer himself thought the cosmos was avenging the unfortunate McCall. And when, after a day or so, the gossip was brought to Eleanor, she took it as a cue and went straight to Ed.

SHE found him in his laboratory, deeply engrossed in pounding a typewriter. He too pricked his ears but they went flapping again when Eleanor suggested to have it over with her father that very same evening.

"But, Eleanor," he shouted, "you don't understand. We have to go another two weeks if we want to make this lesson stick."

"Dad is stuck already. If you keep on pushing him he may never get over it."

"Nonsense. It isn't as bad as all that. And the way he pushed me into oblivion has not yet been paid up—not by a long shot."

"I don't care, Ed. I think this has gone far enough now, and I'm going to talk to dad—tonight!" Really she was beautiful. Ed had to give in, no matter how much would be left undone. So he kissed her and promised to be ready to receive her dad's visit tonight at 13 Tussel Avenue.

The two conspirators had agreed on making the revelation as spectacular as possible in order to create a lasting impression on Waldorff-Palmer. It was therefore after midnight when a knock on his bedroom door interrupted a violent fight which Waldorff-Palmer was staging among the lesser-known nebulae out in space. He was fighting tooth and nail to keep the gassy monsters from killing him.

That noise wakened him and, as he was prone to think later, saved his very life. That it was caused not by a bursting meteor but by Eleanor was sort of disillusioning. However, it brought relief.

"What is it, dear," he asked still shaking from the after-effects of his latest nightmare. Eleanor opened the door and entered. She turned on the light and sat down by his bedside. The man was a pitiful sight, wet from perspiration and in a general condition as if he had just lost the battle of Thermopylae.

"Well, Dad, cheer up," she said. "You've suffered long enough. Get up and dress and then I'll show you what causes your nightmares and somnambulism."

"What?" said Waldorff-Palmer.

"As I said, Dad. Tonight we'll bring you back to normal."

"You're not spoofing me, are you?" inquired the scientist.

"No," said Eleanor with a benevolent smile, "I mean it. In an hour or so you can go back to bed as dreamless as you were before this thing started."

Now Waldorff-Palmer was quite awake. He eyed his daughter with deep and sincere suspicion. But he didn't say anything. When he came downstairs he found her ready to go.

"Where to?"

"Not far, Dad. You hardly need a hat."

Waldorff-Palmer's astonishment increased by leaps and bounds when his daughter took him to the servants' entrance back of the house and led him through the garden to the back fence. They finally arrived at the back door of Mr. R. H. Bartlett's residence. Here Waldorff-Palmer stopped.

"You don't mean to tell me—"

At that moment the door flung open and there, standing clearly against the illuminated hallway, was Dr. Edwin McCall. Waldorff-Palmer relieved himself of a groan which shook the very treetops.

"Welcome, Dr. Waldorff-Palmer," said the great scientist's youthful antagonist. Waldorff-Palmer was too dazed to say a word. Ed grabbed his hand, drew him inside and didn't let go of the old gentleman until he sat safely beside the friendly glow of the fireplace.

Waldorff-Palmer looked from Eleanor to Ed and shook his head. "What does all this mean, Dr. McCall?" he demanded.

"It means, sir, that I have given you a practical demonstration of my invention, the cosmic reflector. That," Ed pointed at his instrument, which was still aimed at Waldorff-Palmer's bedroom, "is the thing that has been bothering you so much of late."

The "patient" groaned once more and with even more profundity. "McCall, I hate to call even a youngster like you a liar."

"You have the privilege of calling me most anything in the world, Dr. Waldorff-Palmer. But I'm going to demonstrate to you right now that my cosmic reflector influences a human being even more fully awake."

"You'll do nothing of the sort, young man!" Waldorff-Palmer's indignation rose to precarious heights. "It's too much of a joke to get a man out of bed after midnight to give him a lecture on astrology. Eleanor, let's go."

Waldorff-Palmer got up. Ed was unperturbed. He switched on his flashlight and offered the enraged man his binoculars.

"Look through them," he advised mildly, "and see whether my aim wasn't correct." After a moment's hesitation Waldorff-Palmer did as told and discovered that the beam of light was accurately aimed at the pillow of his bed.

"So, you scoundrel, you flashed light in my eyes while I was trying to sleep." The "patient's" wrath was rising.

"Not ordinary visible light, sir—but the light rays from interstellar worlds. Tonight, for instance, I reflected on you the light of the Orion nebulae and I shouldn't wonder if your dreams had something to do with nebulae."

WALDORFF-PALMER sat down again. He gasped and fought for words. "You—you're mad. I *did* dream of nebulae."

"Yes," there was a flutter of contentment in Ed's voice that didn't escape Eleanor's sharp ears. "And I could tell exactly what you were dreaming of on each night since—since you got moonstruck."

"Then *you*—" Waldorff-Palmer could no longer control himself. He jumped to his feet.

"Wait," Ed shouted. "Sit down." It sounded like an order and, strangely enough, Waldorff-Palmer obeyed.

Ed worked quickly. He turned the cosmic reflector around so that the flash struck between Waldorff-Palmer's eyes. Then he adjusted his mirrors and, although he did all this in great hurry, he aimed accurately. The generator began its humming and the filaments of the tubes emanated a faint glow.

Waldorff-Palmer suddenly stroked his forehead. His face twitched as if in rage. "You're getting sore now, doctor," the experimenter told him.

"*Quiet!*" Waldorff-Palmer roared. "It's the damnedest thing."

"*Wait!*" Again that commanding voice. Again a quick adjustment of the mirrors and, "Now you're cooling off, Dr. Waldorff-Palmer!"

The "patient" looked with amazement

(Concluded on page 154)

When FLAME GLOBES DANCE

A New Story By MILTON LESSER

Encyclopedia Galactica, Third Edition, 2209, Volume Nine, EX-FLA, page 4007:

FLAME GLOBES. Little-known denizens of the planet Rigon III. Rigon is a cepheid-variable and as far as is known, Rigon III is the only cepheid planet which supports life. This life undergoes a unique metamorphosis during the cold period: the resulting life-forms are the "flame globes."

Perhaps the explorer Kendall, now a Black Hatch lifer, is the only living man with accurate first-hand knowledge of the flame globes. All that may be said with certainty here is that the flame globes feed not upon physical matter but directly upon energy.

See also: Cepheid; Kendall, Kermit; Rigon.

"ALL right," Dobson said to the half-sullen Black Hatchers, "which one of you is Kendall?"

Lucy Conway smiled. "They all look alike to me," she said. It was hard to tell the six men apart—all were big and strong, all wore the same dirty coveralls, all had tangled growths of black beards which hid their faces. All in fact had spent years in the heat and filth and darkness of the engine-rooms of a score of spaceships the galaxy over. All were Black Hatch lifers.

One man shrugged and stepped out of line. "I'm Kendall," he said. "What do you want?"

They could see a still-bleeding gash across his forehead, result of the crash-landing. Otherwise, with the beard and the coveralls, he looked like the rest. But his voice was pleasant.

The job seemed distasteful to Dobson. Perhaps he felt it below his dignity even to converse with the criminal. Lucy Conway noticed this and grinned. For his part, Kendall waited silently until his question was answered.

Lieutenant Dobson's voice showed bitterness. "We've come over a thousand light years and then, merely miles from our destination, we've crashed. Do you know what our destination was?"

Kendall laughed in his face. "How should I know?" he demanded. "We Black Hatchers are taken to a ship on the eve of departure. Shoved into the engine-room, we work for days, weeks, months—who can tell time down there? Then we reach port, sit in prison barracks a few days and are ushered into another ship. What do you want?"

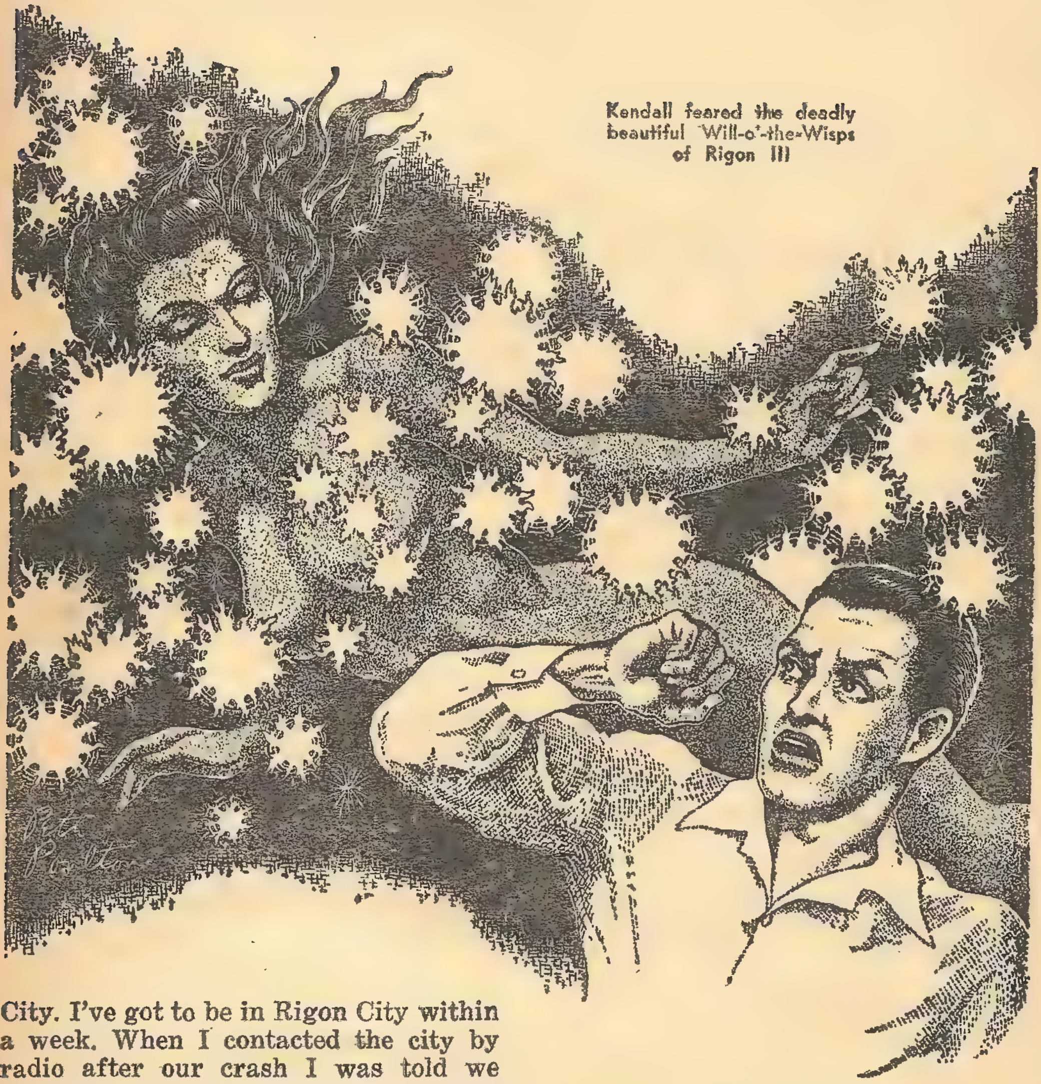
"See here—" Dobson began, annoyed by the man's insolence.

Lucy interrupted him. "Kendall," she said, "we've crashed on Rigon Third. Rigon City was our destination and it couldn't be more than a hundred miles from this spot. But—"

"But it might as well be a million, eh?" Kendall said.

"Yes." This was Grover Conway, the girl's father. He was a big man with silver-gray hair and a stern face. "I'm Conway, the new governor of Rigon

Black Hatcher Kendall's One Path to a Pardon



Kendall feared the deadly beautiful Will-o'-the-Wisps of Rigon III

City. I've got to be in Rigon City within a week. When I contacted the city by radio after our crash I was told we could expect no help. The cold period is coming on."

Lucy nodded. "Father and I know almost nothing about Rigon Third. Lieutenant Dobson has some book-knowledge but he's never been here either. Kendall"—she grasped his hand impulsively—"you've been to Rigon Third before! You could get us to the city if you wanted to."

Kendall hardly seemed to be listening. "Rigon," he mused, half aloud. "After all this time, back again."

"I know," Lucy said. "Whatever you did which made you a Black Hatch lifer, you did right here on this planet. But you could take us to the city and—"

"And what?" Kendall stormed. "And I'd wait another week until a ship came

Led Through the Perilous Passage to Rigon City!

through for more lifers. Next stop Altair or maybe Deneb or half way back across the universe to Sirius. Why should I risk my neck to help you?"

DOBSON shouted, "I warn you, Kendall. You're a prisoner on this ship, subject to my command. If Mr. Conway wants you to—"

"Don't make me laugh. I know the law. I'm a Black Hatcher. All right—I work in the hatches, for life. But that's all. If we stay in the ship during the cold period we'll be perfectly safe. Outside is death. So why should I risk my neck?" He laughed a hard laugh. "Even the Rigon government feels that way about its new governor. They're sending no one out to rescue him."

Conway shrugged. "I can't object to that," he said. "It's the law. When the cold period comes no one is permitted outside Rigon City's dome. The odds against survival are terrific. Yes, if we stay here in the ship we'll be safe. But in two months, when the sun rises again, my job will be gone. A whole year wasted."

Kendall paced back and forth for a few moments. "Do you know what the odds are against my getting you through?"

Lucy laughed. "Kermit Kendall talking about odds!" she scoffed. "Long-shot Kermit Kendall, intrepid explorer and guide, afraid of nothing."

She was working on the man's pride. Besides, what she said was true. Kendall knew the galaxy as well as any man ever could.

He had been around. It had long been his job.

Kendall considered. "That was ten years ago," he said. "I'm pushing forty now. I've grown used to the dullness of a Hatcher's life. Hard work, yeah, but you don't have to take any risks."

"You used to live for taking risks," Lucy told him.

"Sure—when I got paid for it. Now I'm a Black Hatcher."

For a long time Grover Conway sat in silence. Then he got up. He had made up his mind about something. "Kendall," he began, "you ask what's in it for you. Very well, this—it is within the jurisdiction of any planetary governor to grant a full pardon to a Black Hatcher who merits it. If I get to Rigon City in a week I'll be governor. If you get me there," he paused, "I'll grant that pardon."

"Mr. Conway!" Dobson was shocked. "He's a lifer, a hardened criminal. Would you grant him a pardon merely for getting us to the city?"

"Lieutenant Dobson, I've made up my mind. Rigon is loaded with rocket fuel more than any planet in this sector. If a local takes over he might favor the Fomalhaut government. Earth needs that fuel. Kendall, the pardon is yours if you want it."

A slow smile crept across Kendall's face.

"I'll take you," he said.

Conway was pleased. He turned to the other five lifers. "Very well. Now, you men—there's a pardon for each of you who helps us across to the city."

He waited. No one spoke. They looked at one another.

"I don't know—" one said.

Outside they were hard as rocks. But years as Black Hatchers had made them soft, as Kendall feared it had made him soft, inside. They were afraid. They had all heard about Rigon Third and the unbelievable horrors of its cold period. In rumor and legend the stories had traveled across the galaxy. Of all the men who had tested it only Kendall had lived to tell of the horrors. And he didn't talk much.

All five of the other men refused Conway's offer.

Later, clean and shaven for the first time in months, Kendall prepared things for their journey. He itemized what they would need. "Take along shock pistols," he said. "They should be sufficient for protection while the sun is still up. Food—no more than for a week. We can't travel heavy. And space-suits—we'll have to carry them for when the cold comes. That should do it."

Kendall felt his heart pounding furiously as he spoke. He was frightened—

so frightened that he half thought of joining the other lifers and remaining on the ship till the cold period came and went. But freedom—

He coughed nervously as he got his gear together. How easy it would be to remain in the ship until a ground car was sent for them from Rigon City! Plenty to eat and the first real rest he had had in ten years. Why not take the opportunity? He seriously doubted his ability to get the little party through to Rigon City, anyway.

Long-shot Kermit Kendall. How he had changed! He laughed. And Lucy Conway taunting him with memories of what he once had been. Well, it had worked. He'd take them across to Rigon City or die with them in the attempt.

THE space-ship lay on its side in a little clearing its own exhaust had burned in the jungle. Kendall was first out of the lock. He glanced at the horizon. Rigon sat poised a few degrees above the tree-tops, a pale blue sun. Kendall guessed they had perhaps three or four Earth days before darkness and the cold period set in. By then they would have to be out of the jungle or they wouldn't have a chance.

The jungle wasn't particularly dense. Kendall could think of others far worse, but then, he had known they wouldn't have too much to fear until the sun set. When it did, when its last blue rays disappeared into a long, slow twilight, and when that faded into a longer, slower, deadly night—the cold period!

For a moment Kendall's memory swept him back across the years to the other time. He had killed a man on Rigon Third. Justified, he had thought, but the authorities hadn't agreed. There was so much they didn't know.

Kendall watched his companions. He could see impatience in the eyes of Conway. A strong man, Kendall thought, with a goal. Nothing of what they were about to undergo frightened him. He thought of it only in terms of the delay.

And Lucy—to her the jungle didn't seem quite real. That was understandable enough. There were the noises and the dank smells of the place but as yet they had had no contact with it.

Kendall frowned when he looked at Dobson. He could see hatred stamped on the man's face, hatred for him. Kendall had grown used to this—the Black Hatch lifers were the lowest stratum of society, hardened criminals serving life-sentences for crimes against their fellows. But Dobson's hatred seemed unwarranted. Kendall had done him no harm.

Several hours after they had left the ship Lucy suddenly felt the reality of the jungle. With the others she heard a screech and a great flapping of wings. Something big and reptilian flew out of the heavy branches toward them. Lucy screamed.

Mechanically, Kendall went into action. He raised his shock pistol and hardly was aware of aiming. The old familiar reflexes were still there, deep under the crust of the Black Hatcher but still there. He fired and chuckled as the winged monster squawked once, then fell heavily at his feet.

Dobson strode to where the thing had fallen and bent over it. "Keep back," Kendall warned.

The lieutenant ignored him. What he saw was a winged reptile, oddly like and unlike a crocodile, as big as a man. Abruptly the hideous head flashed up and the jaws opened toward him. With a start, he jumped back, stood shaken as Kendall opened up again with his shock gun.

"They take a lot of killing," Kendall explained. "If you're going to gape at every animal we kill along the way, this will be a three man party if and when we reach Rigon City."

"I—I knew it was alive," Dobson blustered. "If you hadn't shot when you did I was about to. But I don't see why I have to explain to a Black Hatcher."

"Then don't," Kendall replied curtly. He could feel a pulse pounding in his temple. "Listen, Dobson. I don't like you any more than you like me. But we're in this together. If I hadn't fired when I did that thing would have had you. I saved you because four of us might have a better chance of getting through than three."

For Kendall that was a long speech. He didn't do much talking as a Black Hatcher. Dobson glared at him but said nothing. Then he struck out hard with his fist. Kendall fell under the force of the blow and sat dazed upon the ground.

He got up with murder in his eyes. But Lucy stood between them. "That's enough," she said.

Conway nodded angrily. "Lieutenant Dobson," he said, "Kendall is not a Black Hatcher any more. He is to be regarded as an equal. And you must realize this, lieutenant. You are the expendable one, not Kendall. Without him we would be helpless."

ENOUGH time had passed for Kendall to calm himself. The lieutenant too appeared to have been placated. He muttered something about being sorry. Kendall motioned them forward into the depths of the jungle.

Kendall walked ahead perhaps a dozen paces when he was aware of a hand on his shoulder. He turned. Lucy told him, "I want you to know that I think you were perfectly right. Lieutenant Dobson behaved abominably."

"Thanks," said Kendall. He turned to walk ahead again but Lucy kept up with him.

"Wait," she said. "You never told us why you killed a man once on Rigon Third."

"No, I never did."

"Why?"

"Oh, let's say he was something like Dobson and let it go at that."

"You have a lot of pride, Kendall, don't you?"

"I dunno. I—you're okay, Miss Conway."

"Tell me frankly, Kendall, do you think we'll get through this?"

Kendall walked in silence for a long while. Did he think so? For some time now he hadn't given it much thought. He certainly had one advantage over the other three. He knew what to expect. He had told them nothing.

Should he tell them, should he tell Lucy? That was another matter. In the telling he would betray some of his fear. He knew he'd have to sooner or later. Well, he'd put it off for a while.

"We'll get through," he said.

* * * * *

Two days later it began to get cold. The chill had come on gradually with a wind from the west. On the horizon Rigon had turned a deep azure. It looked big but without warmth. Everything was diffused with a dull blue glow.

Kendall knew that the jungle extended halfway from where their ship had been wrecked to Rigon City. The other half of the distance was a rock-strewn grassland. He also knew that if they weren't out of the jungle before the last feeble glow of twilight disappeared they would never get out.

He told them now, as Dobson said, "It's about time to sleep again."

"It is," Kendall agreed, "but we'll skip it this time. In about twelve hours it will be dark. We'll have to put the jungle behind us then or—"

"Or what?" Dobson demanded. "See here, Kendall, you haven't told us a thing about this cold period. If you have in your mind the nonsense of those legends and rumors—"

"Will you be quiet!" Lucy said. "You forget that Kendall has been on Rigon Third before. Kendall, what is it here on Rigon Third that is so terrible?"

"Well—" Kendall began. Again he felt icy fear play up and down his spine. He didn't want to show it.

"I've read reports," Conway explained to his daughter. "Are those reports true, Kendall?"

Kendall shrugged. "What do they say?"

Conway thought for a moment. Then he said, "Rigon, of course, is a cepheid. That means it has a period of brilliance and a period of obscurity. Moreover Rigon Third doesn't rotate on its axis. This side of the planet is in darkness at precisely the period in which Rigon becomes an obscure star. Is that right, Kendall?"

Kendall nodded.

"Well, that makes it doubly cold—a couple of hundred degrees below zero Fahrenheit. We'll need those space-suits, Kendall. Right again?"

ONCE more Kendall nodded. All about them, almost imperceptibly, the noises of the jungle were changing. It was hard to tell, but Kendall knew that their volume had decreased. It was as if myriads of jungle animals had all decided to sleep at the same time. Or as if they were preparing for—something.

"In order to meet the changing environmental conditions," Conway went on, "the life of Rigon Third has to undergo a drastic change. What this change is I don't know for sure. Only you lived through it Kendall. Of course, occasionally they *see* things from Rigon City but rumor distorts—"

"What do they see, Father?" Lucy asked.

"They see—this sounds silly—but they see little red globes dancing on air. Little red globes—*dancing!* I don't know what's so deadly about them if they exist but I do know that in Rigon City they've taken the place of spooks. Is it anything more than myth? What are those things?"

Kendall could feel himself trembling. "They exist," he said.

"Tell us, Kendall," Lucy urged.

At that moment came a rustling in the trees. Something dark and heavy fell to the ground.

"Why," Lucy said, "it looks just like a great big cocoon!"

Kendall shuddered. "That's exactly what it is," he said. He took out a knife and plunged it into the leathery gray shell. "Watch," he ordered. He ripped the cocoon open. It was perhaps three feet long and half that in width. Inside was a pulpy pink mass, but Kendall could see, vaguely, the outlines of an animal.

"There are millions of these all over Rigon," Kendall explained. "Every animal except one is building a cocoon now, to prepare for the cold period."

"You mean they live in those things when it's cold?" This was Lucy.

"I wish they did," said Kendall, nodding that they should continue on into the jungle. "But they don't. They *change*. We have something like it even on Earth. Look at the life history of the frog—one great structural change after another until the mature frog is reached.

"Or look at the caterpillar—an ugly, grubby thing, it builds a cocoon for itself and emerges in the spring a glorious creature." In spite of himself Kendall was talking. It was an awful sort of fascination he felt but it took the place of fear. For that he was glad.

"Well, the same thing happens on Rigon Third because its sun is a cepheid. Only the change is more extreme. Out of those cocoons come not animals as we know them but—"

"The little red globes!" Lucy cried excitedly. "It all makes sense now. Tie together what Dad said and what you said and the picture's complete."

"But what are they?" Conway asked.

"I'm not sure. But I saw them. I ran from them. I fought them." Kendall shuddered again. "They come dancing in long slender lines and they tinkle with music and when they touch you, then all the agony in the world is as nothing. I think they eat energy directly. I—"

Suddenly Kendall was silent. He cautioned the others to silence as well as he crept off into the underbrush. He moved slowly, carefully. No one could tell what he was stalking. Abruptly he leaped. They heard a feeble squealing, and then Kendall came up with a little animal the size of a spaniel. It looked like a pig, with gnarled lumpy protrusions like miniature horns all over its body.

"What do you want that beast for?" Dobson demanded, speaking for the first time in hours.

"It's a warti," Kendall explained. "It doesn't change. But it hides. We may be able to hide with it."

What Kendall said was true. Ten years before he had played a hunch and it had saved his life. He had noticed that only this little piglike animal hadn't changed and realized it must have some means of protection against the globes. He had followed the fleet warti out upon the plain and into a cave which, when piled high with rocks, had proven itself to be a sufficient barrier from the globes. To that he owed his life.

FOR the first time Kendall got across to his companions the urgency of their flight. It was senseless to minimize it any longer. If they didn't get out of the jungle within the next few hours they would never get out.

Kendall was only half aware of the vines and creepers that clung to him as he led the way. He could hear the two men muttering behind him, though for the most part Conway was silent, absorbed in the trek and thoughts of Rigon City, beyond it.

But Dobson cursed articulately now at every little thing that got in his way. It was as if he had an enemy in every silent vine that barred his path. And Kendall couldn't help grinning in spite of their predicament when he heard Lucy whistling a gay little tune. For his own part, Kendall plunged on in silence.

Through the trees Kendall watched the blue sun anxiously. It had begun to grow perceptibly smaller. It stood poised on the horizon, ready to dip below, and by now it had shrunk to half-size. The wind from the west increased until it became a positive factor to be dealt with.

"I see light ahead," Lucy called. It was true. The jungle was a canopy over them, cutting out much of the little light that was left. But ahead its rays appeared to be stronger. Could they be nearing the fringe? Kendall hoped so, as he had never hoped for anything in his life.

All the while Kendall held the little warti under one arm. It squirmed every now and then, trying to get away. But as it grew colder, the little animal seemed content with the warmth that Kendall offered and ceased its struggling. Kendall petted it with real affection. They would need its help soon!

Abruptly Kendall stepped out onto the boulder-strewn plain. There was nothing gradual in the change. One moment he plunged through some dense undergrowth, the next he stood clear and free upon a rocky expanse with short grass growing at his feet.

Ahead he could see a big rock. They could rest there—the rock would cut off much of the biting wind, a wind which grew more intense with every moment. And colder.

"We'll sleep for awhile," Kendall told his companions.

Lucy opened their packs and prepared some food while Conway and Dobson returned to the fringe of the jungle for firewood. They would need a fire against the cold, Kendall had explained. Dobson seemed particularly hostile.

"Go get wood yourself," he had told Kendall.

Kendall ignored the insulting tone of his voice. "I can't," he said. "I've got to watch our warti. I wouldn't like it to get away."

Kendall took out his knife and cut some strips of dried beef into tiny cubes. These he fed carefully to the warti, which squealed its delight as it ate. "Have a good meal, now, little fellow," Kendall heard himself saying. "We'll need you good and strong later."

After their meal the four of them stretched out in the lee of the big rock Kendall had chosen. Off to one side, also sheltered from the wind, their fire glowed warmly. Despite that Kendall shivered.

He looked again at the sun. Only a tiny arc stood above the horizon. Twilight—and by the time they awoke, nightfall. Kendall could see that his companions needed rest. And they wouldn't sleep long enough for them to take shifts watching. Kendall shivered again and not with the cold. Watching for the first dance of the fire globes. Well, he would try to remain awake if he could.

He heard Conway snoring lightly and could see the other two breathing regularly. Noiselessly Kendall got up and propped his back against the big rock. For a long while he sat there, looking into the fire and thinking. He felt his fear leave him slowly, like a guest who had overstayed his welcome yet was reluctant to depart.

"Like the old days," he mused to himself. He almost felt the old Kendall again. Not Kendall, the Black Hatch lifer, but Long-shot Kermit Kendall, the man who would take you any place, any time, the man who was in great depand because he knew the out-of-the-way places better than anyone in the galaxy.

A VOICE in the darkness—Lucy. "You're not sleeping, Kendall," she whispered. "What's the matter?"

"Nothing," he said. "Someone's got to watch. I wanted the rest of you to sleep. You'll need it."

Lucy sat down beside him. For a long time she looked into the fire, deep in her own thoughts. Then she turned impulsively and kissed Kendall lightly on the lips. Kendall took the girl into his arms and kissed her fiercely. She felt soft and eager but Kendall suddenly froze and let her go.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I—"

"Well, *I'm* not." Lucy's eyes glowed in the firelight. "You can sleep if you want to now, Kendall. I'll stay up for awhile."

Kendall hadn't realized how tired he was. He remembered feeling to see that the warti still lay snugly beside him, then stretched out and was asleep in an instant, the sweetness of Lucy still lingering on his lips.

He awoke with a start. Off to one side Conway and Dobson still slept. Beside him, back propped against the rock, Lucy slept also. The warti! Kendall stood up fast. It was gone.

Then the cold hit him as his head and shoulders rose above the level of the rock. It came in a stinging blast of wind—cold, colder than anything Kendall had known in ten years.

They were in a little pocket of light from the embers of their fire—a little pocket of light in the cold darkness of a hostile world.

Kendall breathed a sigh of relief when he saw the warti on its side near the fire, sleeping. He prodded it with a foot and picked it up gently. "We'll be moving now, little fellow," he said. He stirred Conway and Dobson, then awoke Lucy. "We'd better be moving," he said.

"Lord, it's cold!" Dobson complained. "And dark! Kendall, why didn't you bring along a light? How will we see?"

Kendall frowned. "We'll be better off in the dark," he explained. "A light might attract the fire globes. A—"

Off somewhere in the blackness, a strident humming! Like strange eerie notes of an organ as it would sound in a great underground cavern, high up on the scale and—frightening. Quickly Kendall ran to the fire. He stamped on it until it was out completely. They stood in the darkness, the four of them, and felt it engulfing them like something palpable.

"The globes!" Kendall whispered. "The fire globes are ready to dance." He felt someone's arm go around his waist—Lucy. "I'm scared, Kendall, terribly scared. Hold me."

"What's the glow?" Dobson asked, fear in his voice.

For a moment Kendall thought it might be the globes. Then he relaxed. "That's our warti," he said. "It glows in the dark. It—"

"Well, get the stupid creature out of here," Dobson ordered. "We'll be seen."

Kendall saw the darkness of a hand cover the warti's glowing body. Then he saw the warti being raised into the air. Dobson was about to hurl it away.

Kendall grabbed his arm in the darkness and struck out with his fist. He heard a groan and felt his knuckles ache with the contact. He had hit Dobson squarely on the jaw. He heard the big man fall to the ground. Kendall felt for the unconscious man's head, opened a canteen and splashed water in his face. Dobson moaned a little, then sat up.

"We can't waste any more time," Kendall said. "Hold hands and follow me." Under one arm he took the warti.

His other hand he linked with Lucy's. He waited till the others signaled they were ready.

Kendall looked up into the sky. If only he could remember! A vast pattern of unfamiliar stars looked down at him. One of them—which one, *which one?*—could guide them to Rigon City in the darkness. Kendall waited, not moving, hardly breathing.

He could feel the memory cogs slip back into place. Once he had killed a man exactly as he had struck Dobson now and for the same reason. Kendall sighed. Of the entire expedition, only he had survived—to become a Black Hatcher.

He looked up again. The stars were familiar. There in the west, the central star of that big cross. If they followed it they'd reach Rigon City. *If* they followed it—if they *could* follow it! The strident humming had grown louder.

SUDDENLY Lucy felt Kendall's hand press tightly. "The globes he whispered. "They're coming!"

Off to the left a string of tiny red lights, like Christmas tree lights strung on an invisible thread. The string hovered for a moment, then—danced. Up and down in a strange rhythm the globes moved.

They were coming closer.

Kendall felt the warti trembling in his grasp. It began to squeal and Kendall fancied the humming became triumphant.

The globes were moving in fast now. As they danced they flickered. They looked like so many globes of fire. Kendall felt the cold biting him and he knew they would need their space-suits soon. Yet he began to sweat.

The globes danced toward them.

Kendall could hear Lucy whimpering a little. There was something about these fire globes—even if you didn't know what they could do to a man, you feared them instinctively. Long ago he could remember—

He placed the warti on its feet and waited. The little head turned this way and that on its fat neck as the animal squealed with fear. Dobson had drawn his shock pistol and aimed it now at the string of globes. They were close enough, each one no bigger than a man's head. Dobson fired. He could feel the hum of the gun's mechanism and knew it was working. Nothing happened.

"That won't hurt 'em at all!" Kendall cried impatiently. "If our warti doesn't—"

Then the warti began to run. Hands locked together they followed its glowing form across the plain. As they increased their speed the dance became more rapid. The strident humming went up and down the scale as the string of globes rose and dipped there in the cold night. Rose and dipped and—pursued.

They ran until Kendall felt a burning hole in his chest where his lungs had been. You didn't get to do much running as a Black Hatcher. All at once the warti disappeared. One moment it glowed there upon the darkness of the plain, the next it was gone.

"Our warti's found a cave," Kendall panted. He reached the spot where the warti had vanished. He felt about. Rocks, big ones—but of an opening he felt nothing. Closer came the flame globes.

They danced almost at Kendall's shoulder and now they were playing again, dancing slowly, patiently. Kendall wondered, what if the cave entrance were too small for them? He heard a scream. His eyes half-accustomed to the starlight, he turned. Dobson had touched one of the globes!

Dobson screamed again. Kendall was glad they couldn't see his face in the darkness. He had seen a man once who had touched a flame globe. It had sucked something from the man. It had—changed him.

Dobson broke away from Conway's hand and ran. Kendall called after him for a moment, then stopped. It would do no good.

They heard him stumbling uncertainly in the darkness. They saw half the string of globes break away and dance off in the direction of his footsteps. Then they heard Dobson whimper.

"We'll have to help him!" Lucy cried, pulling away. Kendall caught her arm and drew her back. "It'll do no good," he said.

PRESENTLY the whimpering gave way to a soft sob. Off in the darkness they could see the new group of flame globes dip once in their dance and then stay there. They had found Dobson. One scream—just one more scream in the darkness but Kendall had never heard anything like it. Well, ten years ago he had, for the same reason. But never before or since.

He knew that Dobson was dead.

And then his foot caught in a crevice. The cave! He had found it.

The three of them climbed within the warmth of the cave and found an ample quantity of loose rocks to pile across the entrance. For a long time they sat in darkness which would have been total except for the glowing of the warti.

The strident humming came nearer and for a long time it lingered outside their barrier. It lingered and then became—impatient. Kendall could sense that. Before long the humming began to retreat until it became so faint he hardly could hear it. Then it disappeared altogether.

"Come on," Kendall said hoarsely.

He picked up the warti and led the way out of the cave.

After awhile it became a nightmare. They ran until the globes came again. They ran with the constellation of the cross always ahead of them. But when the strident humming came again they followed the warti.

There were times when the globes came as close as they had when Dobson had perished. At other times they came even closer. So near that Kendall thought he had been touched several times but couldn't be sure because they had long since donned their space-suits against the cold.

They were never entirely without the fire globes. They danced everywhere, thousands of them. If Kendall led his companions away from one group, it was only to encounter another string of the dancing globes. But always the warti saved them in time—like ten years ago.

And now Kendall could feel his old self back in full command. Perhaps only here on Rigon Third, where ten years ago he had been a free man, could this have happened.

Of the last few hours Kendall remembered practically nothing. He only knew that once Lucy had murmured something about a glow ahead, that they had staggered forward, too tired to talk.

He remembered a great dome of light out upon the plain—Rigon City. And hands which grasped him eagerly and pulled him out of the cold and into warm friendly light. And some questions. He didn't remember what they were. And a bed— so soft . . .

* * * * *

He awoke to feel crisp white sheets under him. At the foot of his bed Conway stood, smiling. "Well, Kendall," he said, "you're finally awake. I'll bet you don't know how long you've been sleeping."

Kendall shook his head.

"Seventy-two hours," Conway said with a smile. "Always knew you Black Hatchers were lazy."

For an instant Kendall started. But then he saw the laughter in the older man's eyes.

Lucy came in. She looked beautiful to Kendall. "She *is* beautiful," Kendall said half aloud.

"Why, thank you, sir." The girl laughed.

"Well, Kendall." This was Mr. Conway. "I think you'd like to know that I got here in time for the governorship. Earth will get the rocket fuel thanks to you."

"Uh," Kendall said, looking at Lucy.

Conway continued, "You're a free man now, Kermit Kendall. What do you plan to do?"

For a long time Kendall looked at Lucy.

Then he said, "Oh, I think I'll stay right here."

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The REIGN of the REPTILES

CHAPTER I

Human Guinea-Pig

KANE stood up and stared at me heatedly. "There are a hundred different things," he said, "that go to prove the theory of man's evolution from lower forms of life. I don't see why you shut your eyes to them and insist that our ancestors were created instantaneously out of nothing."

"I'm satisfied," I said. "I'll stick to religion—you can have science."

"Religion?" said Kane. "In twenty years—"

"Why can't we have them both?" I interrupted him and quoted:

"'A Fire Mist and a planet,
A crystal and a shell,
A jelly fish and a saurian
And caves where the cave men dwell;
Then a sense of law and beauty,
And a face turned from the clod—
Some call it Evolution,
And others call it God.'"*

"Oh, shut up!" said Kane, with customary disrespect for poetry—especially when called upon to support arguments. He got up, went from the room. I heard him tramp down the stairs, slam the front door after him. I smiled.

Kane Sanders is related to me in some indistinct way, and I first met him when he wrote asking me whether I could give him work. I invited him to come and see me. I liked him then—and have grown to like him even more.

He stayed to look after the business side of life—which is far from complicated, involving as it does a mere disinterested correspondence with the fed-up publishers of my short stories. Fed-up because, through other interests forcing themselves on me, my material has deteriorated from common poorness to something unmentionable.

During my two-year association with Sanders I discovered only one flaw—and *it* was of little consequence—in a

Forcibly Thrust Back to Prehistoric Times.

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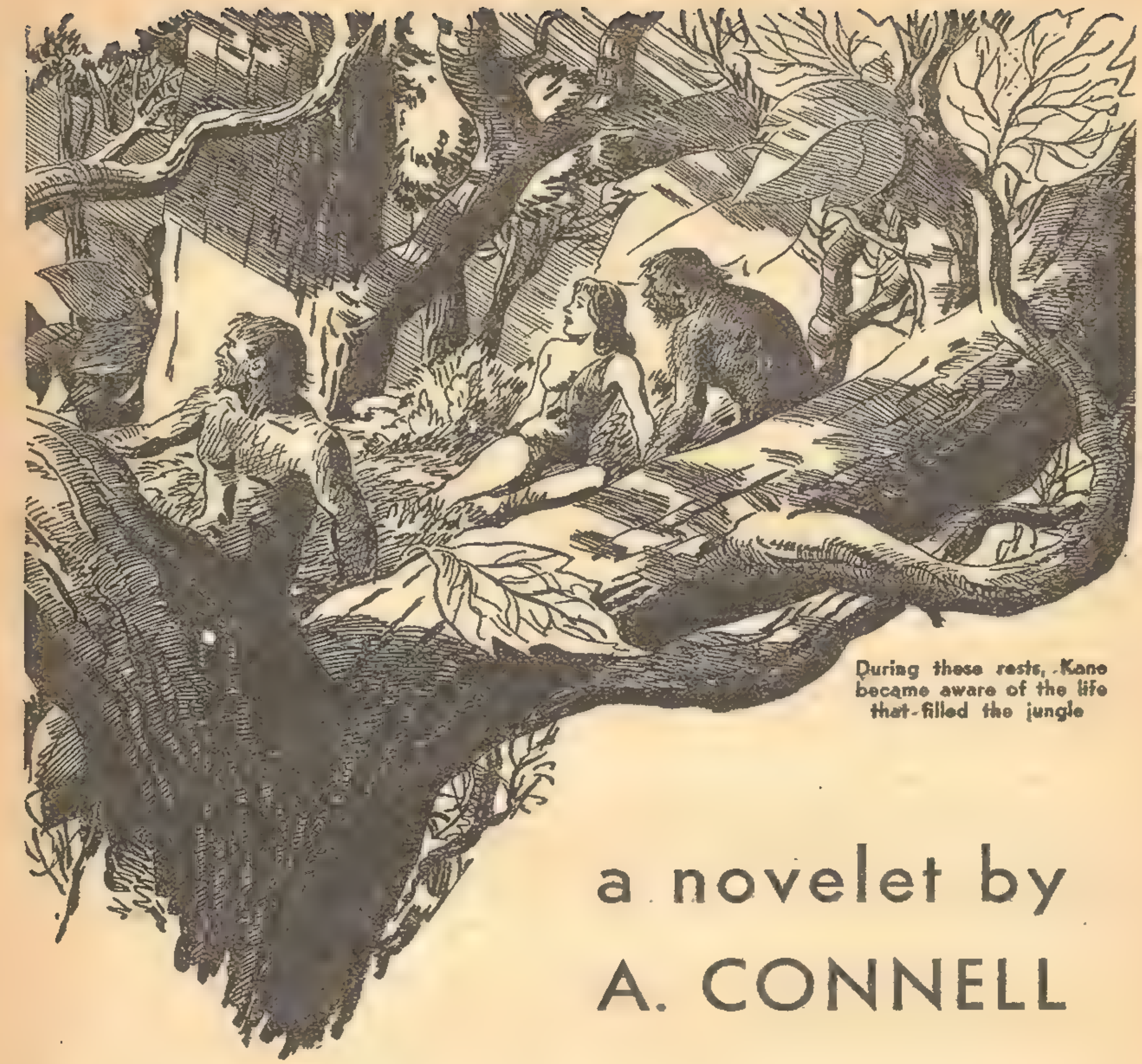

During these rests, Kane became aware of the life that filled the jungle

a novelet by A. CONNELL

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During my two-year association with Sanders I discovered only one flaw—and *it* was of little consequence—in a very pleasant personality. He was too fond of arguments. Since I am a victim of the same fault, and it became habit and tradition to oppose him, things might have been disagreeable if one of us hadn't always been able to see the humor of the thing before it went very far.

On this night I paid little attention to Sanders' departure. He would, I thought, be now walking morosely down the road to the beach. And he would return in his usual high spirits before very long.

I was right on the first score but wrong on the second.

SOME time in the early morning I awoke and remembered that I had not heard Sanders come in. I got up and went along the passage to his room. Just as I opened the door I heard the click of another door downstairs. I waited and presently a man came up the stairs. At first I did not recognize him. The clothes were tight on his broad frame, the shoes were laceless. Then

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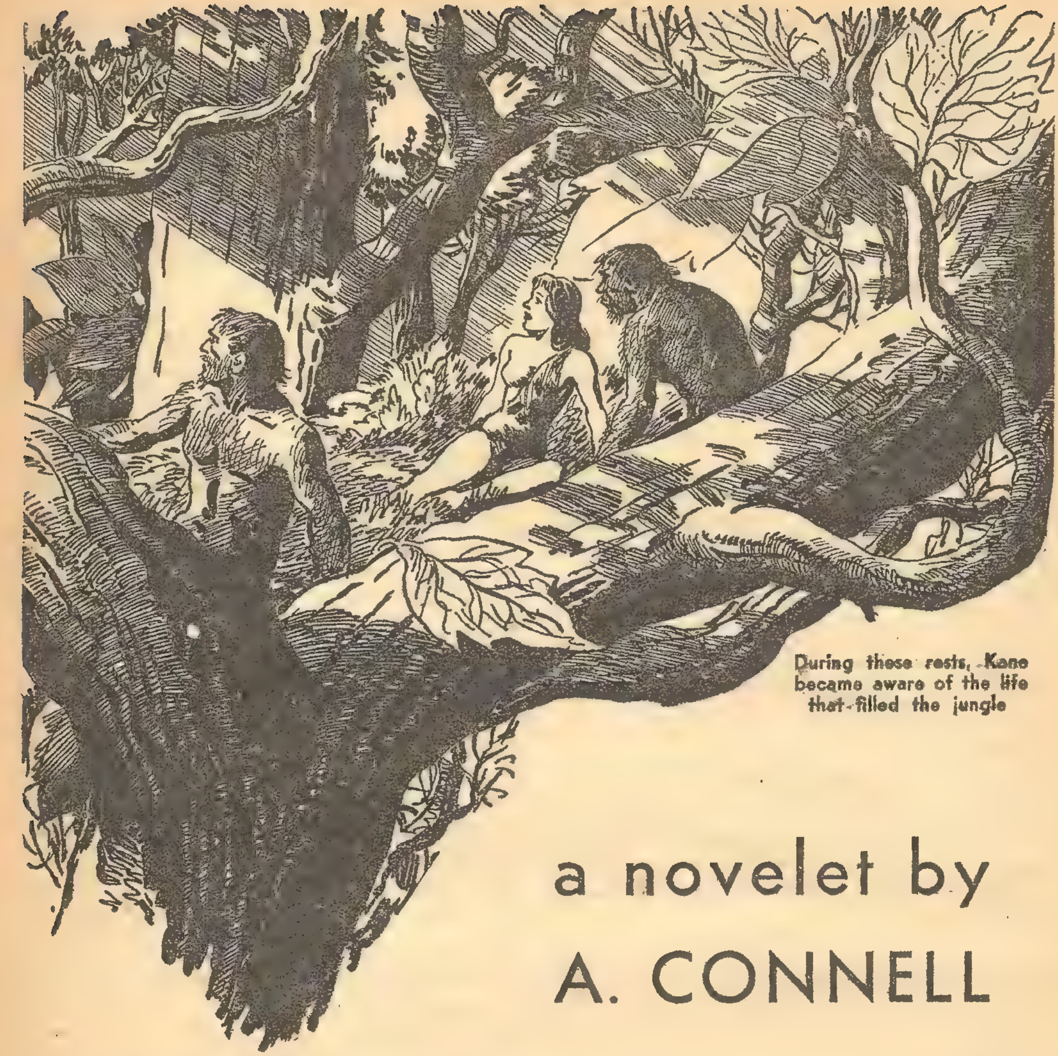
Forcibly Thrust Back to Prehistoric Times. Kane Sanders Discovers a Horrible Secret!



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Kane Sanders Discovers a Horrible Secret!

I saw it was Sanders.

A stubble of crudely-removed hair grew on his chin and cheeks. I think it was this that struck me as most fantastic at the time—Sanders had left me not many hours before, perfectly shaved. Now his face was covered with traces of recently removed black bristle!

There were other incredible things. He was browner than I had ever seen him before. Always big-limbed, he was now superhumanly developed. His hair, I saw when he came closer, was longer than it had ever been before.

He greeted me with a faint smile, took my arm and drew me into his room. When he switched on the light the half-seen details of his transformation stood out starkly. I had an experience I never hope to have again. I felt the blood running out of my cheeks, felt my face go dead white.

Sanders looked at me with strange eyes. "You remember our arguments about evolution and God?"

I nodded.

"I have an awful kind of suspicion that we were BOTH wrong," he said. "Did you know," he went on abruptly, "that there was a time millions of years ago when reptiles ruled land, sea and air?"

Without waiting for me to answer he took something from his pocket and unrolled brown paper from it.

Stark in the white light was a black-scaled five-fingered thing, loathsomely suggestive of the reptilian. It had been severed smoothly at the wrist and in the bent clutch of the wrinkled fingers was the dim reminiscence of some nameless threat.

Fantastically too, about each of those members was a blue-jeweled ring!

"Fulu, emissary of Luada," said Sanders, half to himself. "I wonder what he thinks now!"

"*Kane!*" I said. "What—"

He thrust away the black claw. "Sorry," he said. "Listen and I'll tell you." He hesitated and added fretfully, "These clothes are choking me." Then he took off coat and shirt and sat on the bed with knees drawn up in an odd squatting position. And while I stared dumbly at the leathery brown of his chest, he told me what follows.

* * * * *

When he left the house Sanders wandered down the track to the road with the idea of walking to Salabec. But dusk fell and he stood hesitating on the concrete. He heard the sound of a car and saw its headlights come around the bend. He stepped aside to let it pass but it halted, crept slowly forward, then stopped again like a man in doubt.

Presently someone got out and came around to stand between the headlamps. Sanders felt a man's keen eyes staring at him and he turned away, flushed and ill at ease. But a voice stopped him. "Just a moment—do you mind?"

Sanders said, "Well?" and faced the man. He was short, fragile-framed and loosely dressed. His gray hair was untidy above a white face.

His bright eyes studied Sanders from head to foot and, sensing the young man's discomfort, he said, "Your pardon. I was looking for a man."

"Why?" asked Sanders. "Is something wrong with your car?"

"Why—yes! My car—"

"Then I'm sorry," Sanders said. "I can't—"

"I'm sure it's something insignificant," the other interrupted. "I'd like you to look."

In the face of this point-blank request Sanders went to the man's side as the latter lifted the cover from the engine.

"There—I think the trouble's there," said the man, indicating the ignition. "I'll hold this torch while you look."

Later Sanders was able to see humor in his acting as this man's mechanic—this man who probably knew more about machinery, from the simplest system of pulleys to the most complex electrical apparatus, than anyone else in the world.

For several minutes he fumbled in the yellow light, then straightened. "I can't see anything," he began—and stopped.

There was a peculiar tenseness about the stranger's face and involuntarily

Sanders' eyes went to the back of the car, where there were two dim faces. He was conscious of dwelling in a strange atmosphere and his lips formed a question. Then something whipped up from the darkness and smothered his face. He choked and began to fall.

FOR a time that he could not estimate a heavy grayness lay about him. Then suddenly it fell away. For awhile he stayed quiet, then opened his eyes. He was lying on the bed of a plainly furnished room. Three men stood over him. One was the man from the car—the second he judged to be a Japanese—the third was a thin fair youth whose eyes held something greater than mere genius.

During an unembarrassed silence the three stared down at him. Then the first man said to the other two, "All right. Go and get everything ready. I'll talk to him."

As the two left the room Sanders made an effort to get up—a vain one, for he was handcuffed to the bed. "Let me up!" he demanded. "What—"

The man held up a hand. "There's not much time to waste. Listen—my companions and I are what you might call experimental scientists. Tonight we were driving to Salabec in search of a man for one of our experiments. I saw you. I knew you were the type I wanted, so I took you. Do this thing willingly and we'll pay you well. Otherwise—"

"You can go to the devil!" said Sanders, heaving on the bed.

"I thought you wouldn't. But we'll use you just the same. Now listen even more carefully.

"Juan, the young fellow, is an abnormal. You've heard, I suppose, of mathematical geniuses and people with fantastic memory powers. Juan is frankly a freak intelligence. His brain really belongs hundreds of years in the future. I don't think he has ever read any technical work on higher mathematics, but by sheer power of reasoning he knows more than all the mathematical giants of the world put together.

"Takashai and I discovered him. We attached ourselves to him because we realized his possibilities and because—to be frank—we want a share in the fame that must inevitably come to him. Juan as yet doesn't worry about making money.

"When we began to develop his talents he insisted that our first work of importance be the contriving of an apparatus for transporting objects along time-lines so that he can confirm certain monstrous theories he has formed from studying palaeontological data. Under Juan's supervision Takashai and I have built that apparatus.

"Already we've tested it on bricks and guinea-pigs—transported them along artificial time-lines to both past and future. Now Juan is impatient to settle his horrible ideas on the origin of Man. He'd go himself, I believe, if his presence were not needed at the apparatus."

Handcuffed to the bed, reflecting on the oddities of fate that had thrown him among these madmen, Kane Sanders looked straight at the man and said, "You're mad."

His captor bent over him. "I am not mad," he said distinctly. "I ask you, what would a man of the year one hundred A.D. think of our present-day science? Wouldn't it be plain magic? And you and I are just the same when confronted wth Juan's plans and ideas—for I'm as much a child as you are when Juan speaks. His thought-processes are almost unimaginable."

The Japanese came into the room. "Everything is ready, Carlyle," he said. "Juan is impatient."

Carlyle produced a heavily-scented pad and pressed it to Sanders' nostrils, leaving him in an unresisting half-stupor.

"I'm sorry to do this," Carlyle said, "but it's necessary, since I can't convince you that we are only overzealous scientists."

Sanders was carried into a brilliantly lighted chamber and placed on a metal table. Half-dazed he looked about him. He felt a shock of doubt. Across the ceiling a giant power cable was slung in drooping loops. In far corners crouched green polished machines, oddly vital. Near at hand, circling him, were bright complexities of copper wire and giant silver tubes. If the men were mad, Sanders thought, then their madness had followed strange paths.

He felt hands at his waist. A belt was fastened about him. "Water, food, an automatic and ammunition," Carlyle explained, then went to help Takashai with the machines in the corner. As Juan, silent and aloof, took his place before a keyboard that seemed the vital part of the whole mechanism, Carlyle returned.

"When you next open your eyes," he said, "you will be somewhere about the close of the Mesozoic, the age of reptiles, some millions of years in the past. But I warn you, don't be afraid. Remember you are armed—and there is Juan, who will draw you back when he thinks you have had time to examine the conditions.

Juan turned, hesitated, said doubtfully, "I would like you to notice what life there is."

"Yes," said Carlyle and he pressed Sanders' hand. "I think I'm insane to force this on you," he went on, "but I can't help myself." He drew back.

CHAPTER II

The Room of Horror

SANDERS fell jarringly on one shoulder. His eyes went swiftly around a vast gloomy room. Through the half-ovals of windows far to his left white moonlight poured.

He did not know where he was. It did not occur to him that Carlyle's fantastic predictions might be fulfilled and he wondered where his three captors had gone.

He went to one of the windows, which were glassless, and as he gazed out, the first terrifying doubt came. Below him was a dim expanse of sloping roof, then a belt of darkness, then a wall of impregnable thickness that rose sharply, shutting out jungle growth of such unbridled magnificence and gigantic size as he had never imagined could exist.

Somehow allied with ferns but incredibly bigger they reached their plumes hundreds of feet into the night sky, looming high above the building in which he stood until they seemed to touch the moon. It was a strange moon, big and tinted with green—but its peculiarities were negligible before the chilling terror of the gargantuan forest—chilling despite the warm tropical breeze that blew in his face.

As he turned from the window, Sanders heard an unnatural screaming emanating from the dark forest, a roaring and bellowing. He hurried back across the room, blundered into something that rocked unsteadily and, with eyes rapidly becoming accustomed to the half-light, he stared at it.

He saw that it was a glass globe supported on flimsy legs—and in it was a great wet thing, soft and shapeless, that stirred stupidly. From it came a nightmarish sucking and squeezing as it heaved itself up and down.

With a terror that was silent but none the less real, Sanders went back and forth across the horrid chamber. Each step brought a new ghastly sight imprisoned in a transparent vessel—luminous eyes sunk in white membranous bags of skin—eyes that followed with insensate intentness his every move. There were things that swam like butterflies in amber liquid—jelly-like, pulsing things—mutilated forms floating lifeless in the fluids of their containers. And there were tables loaded with instruments and shapes he dared not look at. There was death unspeakable and life madder than the weirdest dream.

Sunk into one of the walls was a shelf of vessels filled with strange-smelling chemicals and as he felt his way along this he thought he heard a shuffling sound in other regions of the building. He groped forward with new speed until he touched what resembled the bars of a cage. He looked between the bars and at the sight of the thing that leered at him from within—a swaying apelike creature with pouting lips, sightless eyes and mutilated limbs—he involuntarily voiced a hoarse cry.

Almost simultaneously, it seemed to him that the far-away shuffling took on a quicker and more definite rhythm. With an overwhelming instinct to hide he sank beneath the shadow of a bench.

For minutes he crouched there, listening to the shuffle and scrape of the nameless feet as they hastened to their hiding place. Instinctively he knew that whatever inhuman thing owned this room of horror was coming to investigate the sounds he had made. And again, in spite of the tropical warmth of the night, he felt cold.

Now the wall farthest from him grew faintly luminous and soon he made out the outlines of a high oval-topped doorway, between which, deep in the darkness beyond, a spot of light bobbed up and down. Nearer it came, reached the portal, hovered there a moment.

It entered the room, shedding a glow of flat white light about it. And now it revealed itself as a transparent sphere, filled with some phosphorescent substance. On two sides of its surface were black blurs.

It came closer to Sanders. He felt the beat of blood at his temples.

The globe was held by a creature like a mythical devil incarnate! Its oily green needle-fanged head hovered just above the luminous sphere, the hellish red eyes darting from side to side in search of the intruder.

Where the shoulders should have been were hunched lumps that made the man think of folded wings. The body and shuffling feet were invisible. The claws appeared in silhouette on the surface of the globe that the monstrosity held before it.

Back and forth like an embodied demon it roamed, thrusting its long, hideous snout suspiciously into corners, pausing to hold its strange lantern beneath benches, even stopping to peer from the windows as though it suspected someone of having made a hasty exit.

But incredibly good fortune was with Sanders for the devil-thing, though it hesitated near him, eventually passed him by. Satisfied that nothing was amiss it betook itself and its luminary from the chamber and shuffled along the corridor.

Many minutes later Sanders stirred, rose to his feet and groped to the doorway. In the corridors beyond he soon found himself lost and in the unrelieved darkness he fumbled and felt as though through a maze, all sense of direction gone. At odd times sounds from other quarters of the building stopped him like an animal at bay—but mostly all was still.

At length, with dying hope and in utter dejection, he sat down with his back to the wall and stared at the dark until his eyes grew heavy.

HE awakened suddenly to daylight and got stiffly to his feet. Before and behind him a corridor stretched. It was colored vividly and grotesquely and in merging hues which changed so subtly that he could not detect the exact spot of transition.

Sleep had been a stimulant and clarifier to Kane Sanders. He knew now that all this was neither dream nor imagination. There was no more doubt—Juan's almost magical apparatus had thrown him back across the ages of time to a prehistoric past.

Recognition of this, without the horror of the night, gave him immeasurable relief and a kind of growing courage to win his way through this new existence. He had brains and strength and at his hip was a weapon. Behind all that was the everlasting promise that Juan would again bridge the time-gulf and draw him back to reality.

He drank some water and ate a little of the concentrated food at his belt. But before he had finished, he heard a hissing and soughing like the beat of wings. Far along the corridor he saw an approaching shape. Caution uppermost he ran in the opposite direction until he reached an oblong of curtain cleverly set in the wall.

He pushed through it nor was he too

soon, for a moment later a creature soared past him. It resembled slightly a gigantic lizard and the fanged snout, if not the same one, was at least practically identical with that Sanders had seen in the room of horror.

In daylight it had lost its supernatural and diabolical aspect, appearing still hideous but only in a reptilian way. It propelled itself on hissing leathery wings and its sinuous body was clad in a blue silken robe. About its ugly brow was a jeweled diadem. Its claws were alight with jewels.

Alive now to the dangers of the main corridors Sanders made his way along the side passage which the curtain had hidden. He came to another curtained doorway, hesitated, then tentatively parted it.

The room beyond the draping was as fantastically hued as the corridors. From the ceiling, suspended on golden chains, hung a number of canoe-shaped couches and in each of these sprawled a hideous monster like the flying lizard of the corridor—but these were smaller and evidently females.

Their faces were repulsive, with flat tooth-rimmed snouts and little red eyes, but in their claws they held polished metal plates in which they constantly admired their frightful images. They were garbed in cloths swathed tightly about them and on their smooth skulls were set turbans or headdresses.

Grouped about these monstrosities were smaller abject creatures of another reptilian species—but these were unclothed and evidently slaves. They held urns from which they sprayed their mistresses with jets of perfume.

Presently one of the monsters in the swinging couches elevated herself and began what seemed like a song—though its compound of garbled hissing and screaming bore no likeness to any music Sanders had ever heard.

At the song's conclusion the slaves flapped their atrophied wings in applause and another monster took up the tune. Sanders turned away. As he did so his foot caught in the curtain, strained it taut and released it fluttering.

He stood frozen. The singing had stopped! He parted the curtain and saw that each of the lizard-creatures was staring at him.

As he ran he heard a shrill shrieking and the flutter of ungainly wings. Intent on escape he passed back to the main corridor and fled along it. Before long he knew that he was being pursued and ran even faster amid the clatter of his heavy-soled boots.

This last proved his undoing for one of the flying lizards, attracted by the noise, soared from a side passage and threw itself upon him before he could reach the revolver at his belt. Boney claws dug into his arms and held him until three more monsters arrived.

One, who wore a jeweled circlet about his brow, muttered some shrill words. Sanders stood quiescent, aloof, lips firm. The monster repeated the words, then fastened its crimson eyes on him and gave him his first glimpse of the uncanny power of thought transference possessed by these creatures.

Two questions built gradually up in his mind. "How did you escape? Why did you disobey?"

Sanders did not attempt to answer.

By what seemed like endless mental repetition, another question was forced on him. "To whom do you belong?"

Again Sanders was silent. He watched his questioner dismiss his fellows. Then, with both arms tightly held, he was beneath the clacking wings of his captor, carried through great lengths of corridor, until they alighted in a room.

It was the room of his ghastly experience of the night before—the room that he was to know as the creative laboratory of the reptile scientists of Luada.

CHAPTER III

The Mystery of the Pit

IN the yellow light of day the room had lost much of its horror but still there was a breath of unholy mystery in its lizard-like inhabitants as they bent with shining knives over bizarre distortions of human bodies that were stretched on tables before them. Blood trickled from those tables and down into the little gutters that carried it to the brownstained drains in the floor.

On the walls hung parchments inscribed with anatomical cross-sections, some of which suggested oddities of inner structures to Sanders.

At the entry of captor and captive the monsters looked up from their work and stared at Sanders. Again he was aware of the mental questions, "Why did you disobey," and then, "To whom do you belong?"

When there was no answer one of the creatures gave an order. The one who held Sanders gave a garbled reply, then thrust its claws into his clothing and ripped every thread from him, even bending to tear off his shoes. The thing was done so quickly that Sanders' fingers could not reach the revolver before it was torn away with his belt.

As the man's clothing vanished, the reptiles pressed forward with hissing cries. Screeching with fanatical glee they laid possessive claws on him. He caught a jumble of mental communication which they abruptly resorted to.

"A first-class specimen. He must be from my pit."

"No," interposed a second. "You have none as good as this. I am certain he escaped from my pit."

"He belongs to neither of you," interrupted a third. "I was working on a particularly good specimen. I feel sure that this is the one."

Now a monster larger than the rest came forward and took hold of Sanders. "None of you seems to know whom he belongs to. Therefore he shall go in my pit, where in any case he probably belongs."

Sanders was taken down the aisles of tables past the loathsome things in the glass vessels to a table near the end of the room, where the lizard scientist opened a metal trap-door in the floor and dropped him through the opening.

Sanders felt himself fall one or two feet, then struck a slide and rushed diagonally through the darkness. A spot of light appeared ahead, swelled and he was spilled into hot sunlight. His prison was a roofless pit, walled to a height of twenty feet on four sides.

Behind him, above a slope of lower roof, were the windows of the laboratory. The far wall held back the gigantic fern forest that towered green above it to the vivid sky in which burned the brilliant sun.

Standing back a little, his face turned from the jungle, Sanders could see the mingling of marble domes and granite turrets that made up the great city-palace of the reptiles. This pit was one of many walled squares projecting from the main body of the palace.

Sanders was not the only prisoner. In scattered groups about him were creatures of both sexes and some that were doubtful. Almost without exception they were covered with apelike hair and all who were not entirely naked wore only meager strips of cloth.

All were human in a disconcerting way, and a few—these were practically hairless and more sanely built—looked comparatively intelligent. Many of the creatures showed the marks of recent wounds and Sanders could not avoid thinking of the shapes on the tables in the laboratory.

One of the men shouted some words at Sanders. They were oddly like the speech of the reptiles. Sanders did not attempt to answer but leaned against the wall in a kind of detached wonder.

He thought of Juan who was to draw him back across the unguessable centuries, of Juan's quest. There was surely much material about this reptile city if he could only plumb its significance—this strangely distorted condition where lizard monstrosities dominated a grotesque humanity.

Sanders smiled bitterly. Was it likely that he would ever have an opportunity to present such material to Juan? Wasn't it more logical to suppose these four walls and the patch of tropic sky would be all he would ever see for the rest of his life?

The day faded into twilight. A number of the smaller reptilian slaves flew overhead erratically and dropped strips of flesh into the pit. Sanders chewed a little, reflecting that he might as well accustom himself to the fare.

That night he slept uneasily on the cold ground, dreaming repeatedly that all was normal again, only to awaken to the hopeless reality.

Sitting in the shade of a wall in the sultry heat of the next morning to pass the time, he began to fashion a crude loin-cloth from the furry strips of skin left from the previous night's meal.

While he was thus occupied the man who had addressed him on his advent in the pit squatted before him and again spoke to him, this time at sufficient length to convince Sanders that the tongue was identical with that of the reptiles though with a minimum of the hissing inflections.

Sanders looked at the heavy-browed fellow with a sense of superiority. Then he smiled—he himself was more ignorant than a baby in this new world. He made himself open to friendship to Nu-Az, as the man named himself, by a gift of the meat that was dropped in the pit that morning. A companionship was established which, through the days that followed, gave him an insight into the new language.

WHEN the first glimmerings of coherency were built up Sanders was subjected to puzzling questions.

"Who are you?" Nu-Az wanted to know. "You don't belong in this pit."

"I don't understand," Sanders answered. "I don't belong in any pit."

Nu-Az drew back suspiciously and Sanders realized that he was setting about things in the wrong way. He went on, stumbling over the new tongue taught him, and now he employed subterfuge.

"I can't remember anything. I had a fall and hurt my head. Perhaps if you told me a little, everything would come back."

Nu-Az hesitated, accepted the story. "You are in the pit of Lo-Lo, greatest of the evolutionary scientists. You and all of us are the subjects of his experiments. Each of the scientists has a pit like this. And there are many scientists in Luada."

"What is Luada?" Sanders asked.

"Your injury was bad," said Nu-Az. "Luada is the palace and domain of Luad, emperor of the ruling reptiles. I have been told that there are other palaces and other emperors across the great seas and forests but of these things I am not certain."

"Where do your people live?"

This question puzzled Nu-Az "These are my people," he said, indicating the beast-creatures about him. "These and those in the other pits."

"But where do the others of your race live?" Sanders pressed, "the people from whom you were captured?"

"There are no others. I was never captured."

"You mean that the reptiles have killed them all?"

"There are no others," Nu-Az repeated patiently. "The reptiles reign everywhere. We of the pits are the only ones of the new race. There are none outside. You and I and the others of the new pits were made by the scientists."

Cold seemed to creep up Sanders' spine. There were vague stirrings of unholy theories in his mind and he thought of the puzzling, vacant factors in the evolutionary tree built up by men of the twentieth century.

A great fear of this ghastly mystery of the past came over him and he dared not question any further. He looked across the pit at the colossal fern forest, at the shadowy green aisles of its inner depths.

"The jungle would be kinder to us than the reptiles," he said. "You and I could easily escape once we had scaled the wall."

Nu-Az was disturbed. "It is wrong to think of leaving the pits. The scientists have forbidden it. You know that we are to be their new slaves in place of the Zori, who cannot be had in sufficient numbers."

The Zori, thought Sanders, must be

the smaller reptiles who waited on the female Luadans. Evidently there were not enough of them to do all the cloth-spinning and food-gathering that the Luadans required, so there was to be a new race of slaves.

Sanders said, "Yes, it may be wrong to leave the pits—but that's what I'm going to do. Will you come?"

A longing look crept into Nu-Az's eyes. "I will come," he said. "But there is a young girl in the next pit I want. She must come with us."

They waited until nightfall, then Nu-Az climbed the wall. Sanders came more slowly, feeling precariously for the little crevices and protuberances. When he was within reaching distance, Nu-Az leaned down and drew him to the top. The dark warmth of the forest stole about them and they heard the stir of invisible bodies in its far reaches.

Nu-Az was uneasy and hesitant but Sanders urged him on. They went along the wall a little way, then Nu-Az descended into the darkness of the next pit. Sanders watched. He heard movement, whispering voices, and on the jungle side of the wall there was a vast slithering sound that he could not define.

Nu-Az came back up the wall. At his side was a long-haired black-browed female, who clung to his arm in terror. She wore a strip of stiffening hide, which gave her a certain unconscious superiority over Nu-Az, who wore nothing.

The three crept farther along the wall to a tangle of thick vines. "Here we can climb," said Nu-Az. "We can climb to the tops of the trees and be safe."

He thrust the girl and she grasped the creepers and began to climb agilely. Nu-Az followed, then Sanders.

CHAPTER IV

The Primeval Jungle

THEY clambered higher and higher on the rubbery tendrils and soon Sanders was envying the muscular energy of Nu-Az and the girl, who both climbed tirelessly and without effort. A hundred feet from the ground he had to loop his foot through a creeper and rest. Thereafter he repeated this at every fifty feet.

It was during these rests that he became aware to the full of the creeping rustling life that seemed to fill this jungle. He saw nothing but in the sliding and climbing of those invisible entities he began to sense a greater peril than he had dreamed of. His ascent became faster.

The vines ended in a mat of parasitic upper growth that covered the tree-tops and here he found Nu-Az and the girl lying on the vegetation with great leaves wrapped around them. He followed their example with the leaves, lay down in a yielding bed of creeper and slept.

The next day and the ones that followed did not have much significance for Kane Sanders. He was aware that, accompanied by Nu-Az and the girl Yzul, he wandered through the upper reaches of that gigantic semi-fern forest, eating peculiar nuts and fruits, drinking from little tree cavities where water gathered. But all this was an exotic nightmare—it was too far removed from reality to impress itself seriously upon him.

There were, of course, some things that left a terrific impression. Once he swung down from the upper foliage, among the huge leaves and vines, and there below him he saw the ground and on it rolled two horned and armored beasts in a shrieking death struggle. There was blood and a hideous roaring and an earthshaking thunder as the monsters fell over and over each other, crushing the lesser vegetation in a welter of flying green.

Sanders watched, dry-mouthed, until one of the brutes broke away, shook itself and lumbered out of sight. Then he began to climb slowly back to the safety of the upper foliage. He realized now that much of the story of the dawn ages was lost irretrievably to palaeontologists of the twentieth century. He had seen many restorations of the prehistoric giants of this era but none even approached in size the battling creatures he had just witnessed.

When he regained the tangled garden of the tree-tops he found Yzul in a state of panic and Nu-Az clumsily trying to comfort her. "She says something"—he waved his hands in inadequate descriptive gestures—"chased her."

"Don't worry," said Sanders. "All the monsters are on the ground. This is the only safe part of the jungle."

But he was wrong. That night, as he lay in a natural hammock of leaves and creepers, he awakened suddenly to hear a rustling and sliding. And as he lay there staring at the darkness, an unimaginably huge cylindrical body swayed and heaved across his vision and two green slant-eyes turned briefly to look at him. Then it was gone.

The next morning Sanders made himself a rough spear—a tough six-foot barb that he tore from one of the thorny ferns. He saw too that Yzul and Nu-Az were similarly armed. He no longer felt that the treetops were safe.

Toward midday he set off to hunt for a yellow berry that was his favorite food. His search took him down to the middle terraces, where the berries grew—one of many parasites in this jungle—from crevices in the giant trunks of the ferns.

He swung downward with the easy grace of a trapeze artist, slipping down the vines like a spider on a web. Where the foliage was less tangled he walked fearlessly across great natural bridges from tree to tree, careless of the green depths below.

On one of these bridges he went down on hand and knee to reach down for the yellow berries. As he crouched there he felt the great bough vibrate. Looking up he saw the thing writhing along the aerial path toward him.

It was a snake. But it was two hundred feet in length, and its vast heaving body was six feet thick.

FOR one instant Sanders stared at the polished coils driving toward him—then he turned and ran. A few dozen paces, a glance back at the sliding monster and he saw the futility of trying to outpace it. He swerved to the edge of the bough, leaped into space, caught a bunch of creepers and slid down with feverish speed. He looked up. The head of the incredible serpent peered down from the branch above. For a moment the slanted green eyes watched the escaping prey, then the great spade-shaped head drove downward with the speed of an arrow.

Sanders' feet had touched another bough but there was a mossy growth on it that gave underfoot and threw him on his face. When he regained his feet, the head was almost upon him and further flight was useless.

He had no fear of poisonous venom, for such a monster as this had no need of subsidiary weapons, but one snap of those gigantic jaws would cut his body into two distinct pieces. He snatched his spear from his belt, and as the head rushed upon him, he drove the point into one of the emerald eyes. Then in the brief instant that the monster recoiled he threw himself from the branch.

For thirty feet he fell, then a matted mass of leaves and creeper caught and held him. He lay still while a crashing turmoil raged overhead, moving not a muscle until that king of snakes ceased its frenzied lashing and raged away to another region of the forest.

There was quiet again. Sweating from heat and excitement Sanders resumed his search for food. When he had eaten he hurried back to Nu-Az and Yzul and told them that all three must look for a new home.

They moved across the forest-top all the rest of that day and the whole of the next, putting as much distance as they could between them and the haunts of the giant serpent, though Sanders began to think that flight was useless and had an uneasy conviction that they were surviving in this jungle more by luck than anything else.

Once during their long travels they passed the fringe of the prehistoric wilderness and saw the white breakers and far-reaching blue of an ocean or great lake. For almost an hour, Sanders stood on the limb of a giant tree, staring out over the glittering waters as though at any moment he expected some weird craft of this forgotten age to heave into the shore.

But none came and soon something of the loneliness of those uncharted waters began to seep into him and he turned back to the companionship of Nu-Az and Yzul. The old bitterness against Juan returned and hope was dying. He felt now that he was doomed to spend the rest of his days in this immemorial world of the past, naked and forever flying from perils whose extent he could only quess at.

He said to Nu-Az, "In the morning we'll move on again."

Nu-Az agreed but this wandering was not what he wanted. With Yzul always at his side, an idea of a place of permanency and stability was developing in him—the desire for a fixed shelter in a fixed locality.

Back across the forest leagues they ranged, dawn after dawn, night after night. Now Yzul began to complain about the restless, aimless roaming. "Stay with me one more day," said Sanders, who hated to part with his companions and found no less abhorrent the thought of settling down to watch their home-making. So they went on through the morning.

IN the cool of the afternoon he swung down to the lower terraces of the trees and there he found something that froze him into keen-eyed stillness.

Plodding along a newly beaten trail was a string of about twenty naked human beings, each bearing a woven basket filled with freshly picked fruit. For an instant Sanders was in doubt, then he guessed that these hairy creatures were from the pits of Luada.

This was soon confirmed for behind the basket-bearers came two of the ruling reptiles, wings folded, walking on ungainly feet. Each carried a long club but it was evident that they relied less on force than on the ingrained obedience of their slaves to keep things in order.

From the party's heavily laden state, Sanders deduced that it was on its way back to Luada, so he swung on ahead of them. Presently he glimpsed a patch of granite through the dense green ahead and his fears were realized. He had wandered right back to the city of the reptiles!

He climbed to the utmost height of the forest, crawled on to a projecting limb of ferns and looked down on the domed roofs of Luada. Even as he watched a number of reptile slaves appeared on a high balcony with a great quantity of meat. With pieces of this in their claws they flew over the pits of the scientists, dropping their burdens with piercing cries. It was feeding time.

One of the slaves flew close to Sanders and stared directly at him, so he drew back and climbed away in search of Nu-Az. He found him sprawling on a great leaf, basking in the sun, and swung lightly to his side.

"Luada is nearby," he said.

Nu-Az sprang to his feet. Yzul crept to her lord's side.

"We'd better move on," Sanders counselled. "It wouldn't be safe to stay so close."

"Yes," agreed Nu-Az. Then Yzul shrieked and pointed up.

Hovering above and a little behind them were three Luadans!

In a flash Sanders knew that the flying slave had seen him and informed its masters. *"Down!"* he cried. "Down to the lower terraces!"

But it was too late. The reptiles alighted on the huge fern frond. One, robed with grotesque richness and heavily jeweled, stood forward.

"We have found you. But Luad is merciful and though the penalty for disobedience has always been death I, Fulu, am charged to tell you that you will not be punished if you return to Luada with me without resistance."

Sanders followed the garbled words with difficulty. "We're not going back."

"You will come," said Fulu, "and for your resistance you will warrant death." He signed to his companions. They darted forward with true reptile swiftness, seized Nu-Az and Yzul and bore them struggling away in the direction of Luada.

Fulu advanced on Sanders. "Back," said the latter and he began to retreat.

"Do not try to escape," Fulu commanded. "You are a strange specimen. You exhibit new traits of disobedience for which I cannot find an explanation and I intend to have you thoroughly examined when I have you back in Luada. Come willingly. I do not want you killed. Look, the other two have been taken and are even now entering Luada. It is foolish for you to resist.

"I'm never going back," said Sanders.

"You shall!" Fulu cried and sprang with wings and claws extended.

Two things were confusingly synchronized. Sanders saw the crimson-eyed lizard leap toward him. At the same instant he felt a dizziness and the air about him was tinted with blue crackling sparks. He felt the claw of Fulu fasten about his wrist, then he lost consciousness.

He was lying on a cold table.

In his ears was the dying hum of great machinery, the fading of immense power. Bending over him were three faces—and suddenly he remembered and understood. The faces were those of Carlyle, Juan and Takashai.

And most concrete reminder of all that had happened—clutched about his arm was the severed claw of Fulu!

"You are back," said Takashai, "and the experiment is a success."

"Yes," Sanders said with a ghost of a smile. "A success."

CHAPTER V

Man from Reptile

WHEN Sanders finished his story he thrust his hands into the pockets of his borrowed trousers and slipped his legs back to the floor.

"You don't believe me?" he said.

I had been staring wide-eyed at him. "Of course," I protested. "Yes, of course," I protested. "Yes, of course. But there's so much—"

"Yes," he interrupted; "there's a lot unexplained. You want to ask questions? Well, go ahead."

I thought over the many things that were puzzling me then decided to start at the beginning. "You traveled in time?"

"Yes. Or better, time-rates were altered for me. Juan told me something about it and I'll try to give you what I can remember.

"Time is not a constant. Juan told me about a practical experiment performed some fifteen years ago, which definitely proves this. You may not know it but the plain sodium atom is a better clock than you can buy in any shop. For when its electrons are excited it emits electromagnetic waves at a frequency of something like five hundred nine and one-half millions of vibrations per second—and this is the same for any sodium atom, no matter what peculiarities of condition and surrounding it is subjected to.

"Now there's lots of vaporized sodium in the chromosphere of the sun and spectroscopic analysis of this shows that its atoms vibrate *at a slower rate* than the earth atom. In other words time—as a measure of physical change—passes more slowly on the sun.

"That then was Juan's basic principle. Time is not a constant. Then he went further to discover what time really is a product of and the ready solution was that the variation in solar and earth time can be accounted for by difference in mass. In other words, in the presence of a gravitational field greater than the earth's, time passes more slowly. Similarly you can conceive of time traveling faster on a midget world."

I said, "I still don't understand how Juan picked you out of a whole vast world of sea and jungle."

"Juan didn't pick me out—that part was practically automatic. You see, I and my clothes were the only foreign elements, the only things that didn't *belong* at that particular world-point."

"How—" I began.

"Wait. Imagine Juan's laboratory. It is fifteen minutes after my departure into the Mesozoic. Juan is ready to bring about my return. He has calculated—from time and gravitational-potential relationships between earth and sun and from the power of the gravity field he could create without collapsing space—that my journey to the past would occupy some three hours.

"But once having dispatched me he is no longer concerned with that part of my life. He chooses a point in the world-line—which is the path of a body through both space and time—a point a month in advance of the one he sent me to. Then he creates two more gravitational fields and projects the inner one to that point.

"There it made contact with me and within its deadening influence time passed slowly, while outside as it were whole centuries of earth-time rolled by, ultimately reaching nineteen hundred and fifty and Juan's laboratory. If I had been conscious and watching a clock it would have been only a four hours' journey to me."

"Four?" I asked. "Why not three, the same as before?"

"That had Juan puzzled a little. He did suggest that part of the gravitational field must have fastened itself on my clothes somewhere in Luada—thus lessening the power of my field and stretching the trip to four hours.

"I wonder where those clothes are now? The miniature field may yet land them in the laboratory in a day or two. Or, since Juan has relinquished control, they probably finished up in the Ice Age!"

I SAID, "And to think that the last remnant of that almost unimaginable reptile civilization must have long ago vanished from the earth!"

"Not everything," Sanders reminded me. "Remember the claw of Fulu, who must consider himself lucky that he didn't have his head taken off by the field. Anyhow that's the wrong way to look at it. It's a queer thing—past, present and future—all seeming to exist at once like—like a reel of movie film unrolled along a road.

"Only by moving along the film do you get the illusion of movement in it and the idea of time. Yet past, present and future are all there at once, though the people in the film have to follow the path set out for them. If only those people could free themselves from the film—though of course they're only images—they'd have the whole panorama of time open for their inspection. I think it was something like that with me."

"There's something else," I said. "Those reptiles were intelligent—like human beings."

"Like human beings," Sanders repeated as though the words held some secret meaning. "Yes—Juan thinks that the civilization of Luada was Nature's last try at giving the reptiles the scepter of world supremacy.

"One of the prime essentials of survival is tribe-making, and that's why the ants may one day rule this planet. But when the Luadans started to play about in their laboratories they undid all Nature's plans and unconsciously brought about their own downfall."

"By the way," I asked, "did you discover where Nu-Az and Yzul and those others *did* come from "

Sanders sprang up angrily. "Have you missed the whole meaning—the whole truth of the thing? Remember Nu-Az's words, 'and we were made by the Luadans.' Now do you understand? ***The human race was created in the Luadan laboratories!***"

"That's pure madness," I said, controlling myself with difficulty at the grotesque statement. "They couldn't create life."

"Why not? Life is only a chemical curiosity. And that isn't the solution as Juan sees it. The scientists of Luada experimented *with germ-cells from their own bodies*—a warped and planned ectogenesis—and man and his evolution were started. So you see Juan isn't so far from the common theory of Man's descent from the reptiles. He's just filled in the main link."

"I refuse to believe," I said. "It's too fantastic, revolting. You were misled."

"I hope to heaven I was—though it all fits in with what Juan anticipated before the experiment."

"That reminds me," I said suddenly. "Those men—you must know where they are. I'll call police headquarters and have them taken for—"

"No," Sanders said, smiling wanly at my excitement, "you won't do anything like that. You see, I've made arrangements. Tomorrow I'm going back to the fern-jungle and Luada—to learn the truth once and for all."

* * * * *

And even as he promised so he went. And as I write the conclusion to this, my mind toys with Sanders' incredible theories. Reptiles—man—next the insects.

And who knows what non-protoplasmic cycles of malevolent monstrosities shambled in the primal ooze and vapor of a coalescing Earth aeons before Nature even thought of the reptiles? Who can even guess at what anthropomorphic shapes will straddle the deathless night of this planet when our sun is an ember and reptile, man and insect are all a forgotten dream?

Sometimes, in moments of doubt, I envy Sanders, for it is in his power to know these things.

THE COSMIC COCKTAIL

(Concluded from page 129)

at his tormenter. He rubbed his eyes. Suddenly he smiled. "Naturally, I'm cooling off. After all, I'm a scientist, and I hope I can still recognize a great discovery when I see one."

"Wait!" The third command was even sharper than the previous. Ed's hands whirled while he adjusted his electrically sensitized mirrors once more.

"Now you are feeling *very* mellow, doctor."

Waldorff-Palmer smiled benignly. "Am I not the father of this girl here, Ed? Wouldn't it make a father's heart mellow to see his only child so deeply in love?"

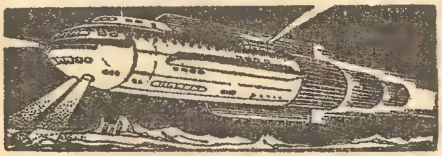
"Dad!" Eleanor cried and flung her arms around her father's neck.

Unobserved Ed managed a fourth adjustment. Now father and daughter were in the range of the cosmic reflector. Ed waited for their emotions to subside.

Sobbing on her dad's shoulder Eleanor said demurely, "Oh, stop it, Ed. We don't want to get angry again."

Waldorff-Palmer smiled at him. "Turn it off, Ed. I'm convinced without flying into another rage. You win. Your instrument does things which in another age would have sent you to the stake. If you weren't a scientist I'd call it stark magic. You'll upset all the psychological rules of Freud and you'll throw physics into turmoil because you are proving that matter and mind are inter-related.

"Ed, come here, son," he stretched out his hand over the shaking shoulder of his daughter. "Take this child and make her happy. And I'll see that the newspapers will soon print big headlines about your—stupendous discovery."



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COSMIC ENCORES

(Continued from page 7)

elite of sorts. Devotees of science fiction, feeling at once both scorned and "different," have always shown an instinct for banding together—in groups or clubs or semi-fraternal organizations—and, once thus organized, shutting out the rest of the world.

"I belong—you do not. Therefore I am worthier than you."

This is the basic feeling of too many members of such groups.

All too often, instead of seeking to widen their circle among non-afficionados, they repel all but those already caught in the fascination of stf. They develop slanguages and codes calculated to scare the wits out of the uninitiated.

They tend to satisfy their bruised but burgeoning egos at the expense of the growth of science fiction as a whole.

To help form such a group, to be admitted to one, to practise its forms with its fellows, is a tremendous temptation, of course. It is a constant temptation to a man in our position, whose job makes him a cynosure of fan attention and, to some degree, flattery.

However, it is a temptation to which we do not intend to succumb. For if we did so, if we permitted ourselves to become actively involved in any fan group, we would be a traitor not only to our publisher and our job but to science fiction as well.

In an era of potential expansion it is our job not only to pay service to readers already acquired but also to get such readers to do all in their power to interest other practical fans in the magazine.

With this in mind we wish to close with the statement that, while there may be a heavyweight and hard-to-understand scientific or pseudo-scientific theme in any single stf story—the chances are there will be nothing of the sort. Primarily it must be a good story before all else to be published—and this means real characters, plausible situations and an opportunity for the reader

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VANDALS OF THE VOID is a fine and exciting story that more than merits a second time in print. We hope you like it as well as we did.

Our second lead for the forthcoming issue of FSQ will be a novelet by Captain S. P. Meek, THE OSMOTIC THEOREM. It tells of Professor Hurlburt's discovery that the Earth's skin needs a boring to obtain a release from the incredible pressure of its molten core—and the titanic operation that is the result of his discovery.

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LETTERS FROM OUR READERS

As usual, our readers are out in force, and we are hard put to it to keep this department from expanding to unspeakable lengths!

SOMEWHAT IMPROVED
By Morton D. Paley

Dear Editor: The second FSQ was somewhat improved over the first, though not much so. THE MOON AND MR. WICK and THE BORE topped the old stories, but Harris' THE MAN FROM BEYOND was good, too. Harris, Arthur, and a few other old-timers turned out pretty lasting stuff in their day, but most of the others did not.

THE EXILE OF THE SKIES was fairly good, but tended to become somewhat boring. I don't see why you insist on running so long a novel. A couple of novelets, would, I think, be far better. Then again, with some of the novelets you've been printing, I'm not so sure. Any by Harris, Arthur, Weinbaum, Leinster, Smith, or Williamson should fit the bill.

Lawrence—or Stevens (which is his real name) could be replaced by Finlay without any regrets from this reader. And who, pray tell, did the pic for A THIEF IN TIME? It was neither especially bad, nor especially good, but I do like to know the identities of your contributors.

New York fans may be interested to know that a new club is being formed in the area. Those interested should contact me.

Here's hoping for a better FSQ as time goes by.—1455 Townsend Avenue, New York 52, New York.

Well, Morton, I am glad you give us credit for a little improvement, and hope that our forthcoming issues are even better suited to your taste. Good luck with your new club.

CONGRATULATIONS
By Roger N. Dard

Dear Sir: I've just received No. 1 of your new publication, FSQ, and although I have not had time to read it, I would like to congratulate you for having at last acceded to the clamor of the fans, and given us a magazine of fantasy classics. I'm glad to see you started off No. 1 with a novel by Edmond Hamilton. Good Old World Wrecker hasn't ever written a bad story, and I'm looking forward to rereading this old timer.

I have just one complaint: the art work. Honestly Ed, why did you clutter up a perfectly swell magazine with those atrocious illustrations? The cover, and every interior illo—with the single exception of the one spread across pages 12 and 13—were very poor. Yeah, I know, Virgil Finlay did some of them, but they might have just as well been signed Joe Doakes. What the heck has happened to this one time swell artist? Take a tip, dear Editor, and grab Paul to do every illo for your next

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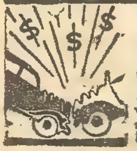

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issue, if you want the artwork to complement the array of swell yarns you have got lined up. Wishing FSQ a long and successful life.—232 James Street, Perth, Western Australia.

Thanks very much for your kind sentiments. I only hope that your wishes in respect to FSQ come true. It's nice to know we reach as far as western Australia.

BETTER THAN THE FIRST
By Ed Cox

Dear Sir: How d'you like the stationery? You'd better. It was your idea originally, indirectly that is.

But the reason I'm taking your time is the 2nd issue of the FANTASTIC STORY QUARTERLY. Ah, yes. To begin with, it was even better than the first issue. Naturally, the lead novel is the main attraction and therefore, I usually compare your group of magazines with the novel in mind. This issue's novel can certainly hold its own with any of them. 'Twas better than the first one. It even reminded me somewhat of E. E. Smith's galactic epics with so many different races, planets, etc. But all this in our own asteroids. I especially liked this one because of that. So much adventure, color, life and scientific doings in the best space-opera style all within our own system. Gad, that guy sure could slaughter the alien monskers what?

One of the first stories I've ever read by R. F. Starzl is his "The Last Planet." And I liked it. I wish I could think of a term that can embody an all-round rating and serve for a label for the type of story that this one represents. But, let's see, you could think of an Edmond Hamilton story, like his "Star of Life" for instance. A thoroughly enjoyable story. That's what this was. There you have my simple opinion but still no definitive term.

I'm pretty sure that John Beynon Harris is no pen-name of Fearn's, but this story of his certainly reminded me of Fearn's "A Visit to Venus" in the 1st FSQ! Which isn't bad.

"The Light Bender" didn't leave me too enthusiastic for more, but it is representative of Kelley's advanced themes for the era in which most of his work appeared. Pioneering he was. (Or am I wrong?)

Next we have James Blish and his "The Bore." This and Jack Williamson's story were particularly enjoyable. Completely satisfying little yarns. Liked the new ones better this time than I did last time. (I know who "Carter Sprague" is now, by the way. Opinion of the yarn by CS last time is unchanged.) Young's short-short was a very nice little ironic ttt. Yes.

So, after those brief none too definitive little reviews, I hope you have an idea of how the issue rated with at least one reader. I might add that all but Beynon and Kelly's stories were par or above (according to my own little par for FSQ).

I don't pretend that this is a very good letter, but at least you do know how I like the zine. Now that you know, here are a couple of comments on the Annual. I was going to write a letter, but decided not to. Having some space left here, I will say that the novel was very good reading, especially nice since I was sick at the time I read it. Binder and Sharp's stories were very good too. Shorts were not so good. Harris' was actually chuckle-provoking. Some of the glaring flaws! But I'll admit that I probably couldn't do better. I see where in commenting on Kelly's story this time for FSQ, I was thinking of his yarn in the Annual!

All in all, the Annual had good lead material that will give you a bit of a time to equal. I might say the same for the FSQ issues too. Guess this is it. Except that the illustrations are at least functional. You could give Stevens a nice long vacation for a year or so, and then give him another try. Guess this is all. Keep up the nice work.—4 Spring Street, Lubec, Maine.

Glad you liked the lengthier jobs in FSQ. For some reason, back in the old days editors and writers alike concentrated more on quality in novels and novelets than they did with regard to short stories—but we're trying to bring you the cream of the crop in stories both long and short.

ABSOLUTELY AND ENTIRELY

By Eugene Calevaert

Dear Editor: It is my opinion that no present day science fiction story can ever equal

[Turn page]

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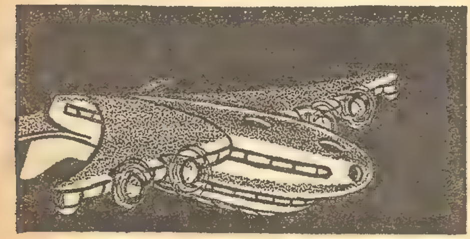

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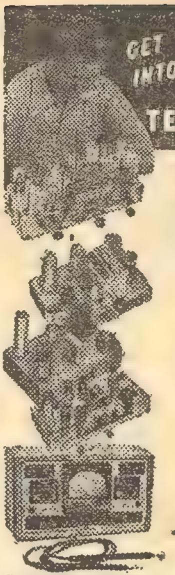

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the kind of material presented to the reading public of SF between the years of 1933 and 1940, inclusive. They were absolutely and entirely different from any other stories regardless of structure, plot, etc.

Your new publication, FSQ, gives me a chance to read again stories which I enjoyed reading very much in the past, and except for the new stories in each issue, outside of THE HIDDEN WORLD, in the first issue, I remember reading all of the stories. After this lapse of years, I might even say it is more interesting reading them over again. It makes it much simpler, actually, to pick a favorite instead of just stating a preference.

I liked CHILDREN OF THE RAY best in the first issue. In the second issue, it was THE MAN FROM BEYOND. I liked both of the new stories in the first issue and both of the new stories in the second.—3138 East Congress Street, Detroit 7, Mich.

The overall impression of your letter, Mr. Calevaert, leaves us with a definite feeling that you like SF despite your preference for the stories of 10 or 20 years ago. At any rate, we are glad you enjoyed reading FSQ, and hope you continue to do so.

FIVE YEAR VETERAN
By Bud Stephensen

Dear Editor: I have been reading science fiction for five years, and I wish to say your new magazine is super-plus. It gives us fairly new readers a chance to see what we have missed. This is the first time I have written to a magazine, and my letter probably won't be printed, but I will speak my piece anyway. I see that right off the bat, readers have you on the carpet for retouching. There is nothing wrong with retouching, just as long as it doesn't look too obvious. EXILE OF THE SKIES was without a doubt the best, best story I have ever read.

THE LOST PLANET was wonderful. I have watched the sun ever since I read the

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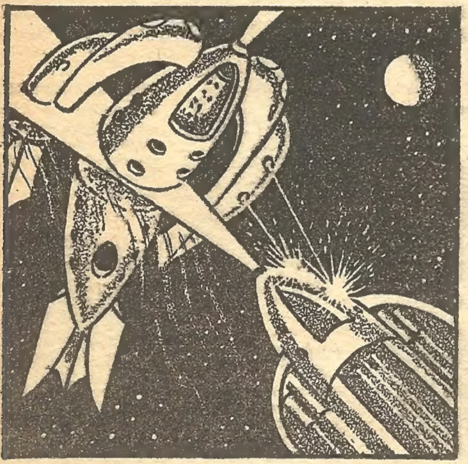
story, and you know I think it's getting dimmer. Imagination? THE MAN FROM BEYOND was a gem. A very, very neat ending. A THIEF IN TIME was short but sweet. THE MOON AND MR. WICK passed, but that's all. THE BORE—he wasn't a bore—he was an idiot. THE LIGHT BENDER—this could have been a novel, but as a short story it was incomplete. It was like reading the first three chapters of a story and finding the rest of the pages torn out.—30 Comax Rd., Nanaimo, British Columbia.

Well, all we can say is that we hope you're right about us. We try to pick the best available and when can do manage to assemble some extra good ones, we are glad to be appreciated. Not get on with the rest of the magazine. We're signing off with many thanks for your kind attention.

—THE EDITOR.

NEXT ISSUE'S HEADLINERS



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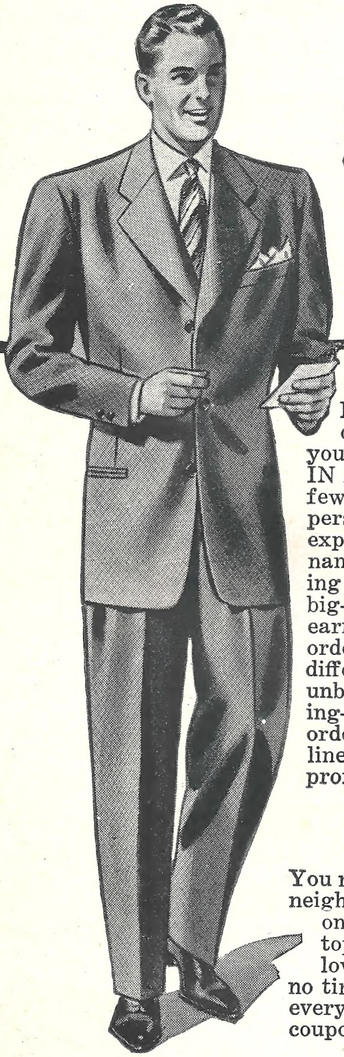


PAY NO MONEY — SEND NO MONEY!

My values in made-to-measure suits are so sensational, thousands of men order when they see the actual garments. I make it easy for you to get your own suit to wear and show—and to MAKE MONEY IN FULL OR SPARE TIME! MY PLAN IS AMAZING! Just take a few orders at my low money-saving prices—that's all! Get your own personal suit, and make money fast taking orders. You need no experience. You need no money now or any time. Just rush your name and address for complete facts and BIG SAMPLE KIT containing more than 100 actual woolen samples. It's FREE! Get into the big-pay tailoring field and earn up to $15.00 in a day! Many men are earning even more! You can begin at once in spare time to take orders and pocket big profits. All you do is show the big, colorful different styles. Men order quickly because you offer fine quality at unbeatable prices. Yes—superb made-to-measure cutting and sewing—and complete satisfaction guaranteed. It's easy to get first orders, but repeat orders come even easier. With my big, complete line you begin earning big money at once and you build a steady, big-profit repeat business at the same time.

NO EXPERIENCE — NO MONEY NEEDED
EVERYTHING SUPPLIED FREE!

You need no money—no experience—no special training. Your friends, neighbors, relatives, fellow-workers, will be eager to give you orders once you show them the outstanding quality of the fabrics, the top notch fit of made-to-measure tailoring and the money-saving low prices. Every customer is a source of additional prospects. In no time at all, you'll find the orders rolling in faster and faster. And every order puts a handsome, spot-cash profit in your pocket. Mail the coupon for your big FREE OUTFIT of styles and samples NOW!

H. J. Collins, Progress Tailoring Co. Dept. M-377, 500 S. Throop St., Chicago 7, Ill.

Mail Coupon for FREE OUTFIT!

We supply everything—sample fabrics, full-color style cards, order forms, measuring materials .... all packed in a handsome, professional leatherette-covered carrying case. Work full time or spare time. Either way you'll be amazed at how fast you take orders and how your profits begin to mount! Fill out and mail coupon today.

Send No Money — Mail Today — No Obligation

H. J. COLLINS, Progress Tailoring Co., Dept. M-377
500 S. Throop St., Chicago 7, Ill.

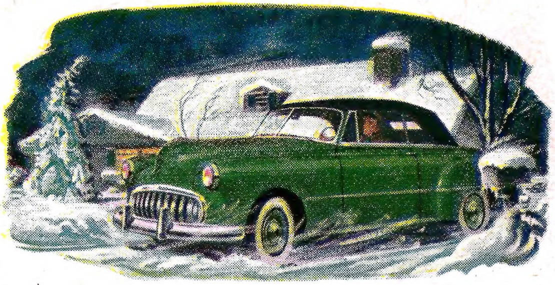
Dear Sir: I WANT A SAMPLE SUIT TO WEAR AND SHOW, without paying 1c for it. Rush Valuable Suit Coupon and Sample Kit of actual fabrics ABSOLUTELY FREE.

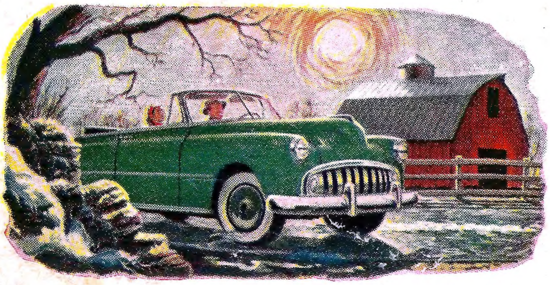
Name ....

Address ....

City .... State ....

You're safe when
it's cold...





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it's hot...
with

"PRESTONE"

BRAND

Anti-Freeze!

YOU'RE SAFE FROM FREEZING!
YOU'RE SAFE FROM FOAMING!
YOU'RE SAFE FROM
RUST AND CLOGGING!

No other Anti-Freeze can give you this same protection!

One shot lasts all winter!

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UNION CARBIDE
AND CARBON CORPORATION
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ANTI-FREEZE
DOES NOT BOIL AWAY
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